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MY WANDERINGS IN THE SOUDAN

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MY WANDERINGS IN THE SOUDAN

BY MRS. SPEEDY

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A SUAKIN PILOT

IN TWO VOLUMES—VOL. I.

LONDON
RICHARD BENTLEY & SON, NEW BURLINGTON ST.
Publishers in Ordinary to Her Majesty the Queen
1884

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DEDICATION.

To my husband, whose never-failing help smoothed every difficulty of the way, I dedicate the following slight record of our tour through the Soudan in 1878; *compiled during his absence on the Mission to Abyssinia in the early part of the current year.*

August 1884.

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PREFACE.

THE following letters were not originally intended for publication. They were addressed chiefly to my mother, and at the time I wrote them I had not the least idea that any but those in the immediate circle of my own family and intimate friends would ever read them. Until lately I was not even aware that they had been preserved. Soon, however, after the present difficulties in the Soudan arose, when it became apparent that interest would be aroused regarding that part of Africa, they were returned to me with urgent requests that I would put them into print.

For a considerable time I hesitated, and it was only when the requests were reiterated that I ventured to commence selection and revision.

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The desire to comply with the wishes of my friends, and the fact that I am, I believe, with the exception of Lady Baker, the only lady who has as yet made a tour through the Soudan, are my apology for bringing to the light these slight imperfect sketches.

In the beginning of the year 1878 I persuaded my husband to take me to Africa, but the short trip which began and ended in Egyptian territory was but part of that which at the outset I hoped might be feasible.

My original wish was to go to Abyssinia—special interest regarding that country having been raised in my mind from Captain Speedy's residence there many years before, his connection with it during the Expedition of 1867 and 1868 under Lord Napier of Magdala, and his subsequent guardianship of the late Prince Alamayu, son of Theodore, King John's predecessor. I did not, however, get so far. Our plans resolved themselves, even before we set forth, into a shooting tour through that part of Nubia known as the Eastern Soudan. We

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started for our trip from the Island of Penang in the Malay Straits, having resided in the neighbouring Malay Peninsula for some years previously. Our route was thence to Suez, and from there down the Red Sea to Suakin—a port at that time but little known, although it has since become one of much note.

From Suakin we followed the caravan track to Kassala, from which town we went to the river Settit, the most southerly point of our wanderings; and though we were within sight of the Abyssinian hills, we did not cross the border. I still, however, cherish a secret hope that the day may yet arrive when I shall find myself at the Court of King Johannes—my former wish to visit Abyssinia having been still further increased since my husband has been again called to that country to pioneer the Mission recently sent to it under Sir William Hewett.

CORNELIA MARY SPEEDY.

LONDON, 15*th August* 1884.

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CONTENTS.

LETTER I.

On the eve of starting—Suakin is our port—Our native staff—Englishman expected to join us—Our baggage—Home-made tents—Hospitality at Suez—Old acquaintances—Shivering with cold—Last packings . . . . . Pages 1-9

LETTER II.

The border of the terrible land—On board the "Tor"—A storm gets up—Suakin Harbour—Hospitality of the Arab Governor—Our rooms in the Pasha's house—Writing under difficulties—No bathing possible—Dinner with the Pasha—Suakin—Our proposed route to Kassala—Plans for the future 10-25

LETTER III.

Everything ready for a start—My first acquaintance with Hadendoa Arabs—Our start from Suakin—Dinner by moonlight—Debûs, the native hound—Skins for holding water—I meet three hundred camels—"Beni-Amer" Arabs—Afternoon tea under a mimosa bush—We sleep out of doors—Flora's midnight visit—We reach "Sātrāb" 26-39

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LETTER IV.

Mail goes regularly to Cairo—A refreshing stream—The righteous wrath of my husband—We leave Sātrāb—Travelling in the dark—Fear of hyenas—The Malay on the black donkey—"Zaituna," "Elfie," and "Fairy"—Refractory camel drivers—I am famishing . . . . . Pages 40–53

LETTER V.

Letters instead of diary—A cure for nervous invalids—Stones under my pillow—Wild asses in sight—A long shot—Bargains with myself—Cold mornings and evenings—The scorching wind—The sentry asleep—Retribution falls on the guide 54–66

LETTER VI.

Gentleness towards camel drivers thrown away—The natives not greedy—The new guide had deceived us—The kettle is lost—We lose our way in the dark—Hopeless search for the telegraph poles—Capabilities of the Soudanese—The patois of the natives—We smell wood smoke—A well-greased skin—The welcome "Diwan"—Sleep at last 67–83

LETTER VII.

Account of Lagua completed—The rough path to the gorge—Filling the water skins—The eagle overhead—The fatted sheep—A native delicacy—Ahmed is found—Warning to the camel drivers—Yes and no, by sounds—Amazement at my boots—Sympathy with my torn dress—Terror at my being able to write—Good-bye to Lagua 84–99

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LETTER VIII.

How I write my letters—"A walking tour through the Soudan"—The dogs begin to get "done up"—"Flo" and the sulky Arab—The hyena hunt—Contrast between the dogs—Debûs was dearly bought—The glittering prize—Gorge infested by lions—We march in single file—An unpleasant apprehension—A Job's comforter . . . . . Pages 100–113

LETTER IX.

Encamped at Miteb—Cooking in spite of high gale—"Durra"—Coiffure of mutton fat—Curl papers of white grease—Tent tied closely down—Camel men hate early rising—Carrying cash in the Soudan—The treasure in sealed bags—Possible robbers and wild beasts—African heat—The flinty sand—The Khor, Karkoeb—Vegetable ivory—Dôm palms 114–132

LETTER X.

Resaid or Resai—Nearing Wandik—Wretched mohatta—Lovely valley—Watering camels and goats—The patient waiters—The invaluable bath—My precious treasures—Soudan prices—Exquisite camping-ground—A note of discord—The guilty Hussein—Self-interested camel drivers—A friend in need 133–149

LETTER XI.

Journey to Bulāk—Camping-grounds—Camel men deceive us—Noisy and excited—Cunning devices—Sweet revenge—Bright young Hadendoa hostess—Friendly memory—Goatherd pursued—Trust displayed by him—Ludicrous scene—Heat increasing . 150–162

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LETTER XII.

Arrival at Felik—Aradeb—Greek merchants—Two sheep for a dollar—The Indian "kukri"—Collecting tribute—Oppression of the Soudanese—A "zareeba"—My first sight of the mirage—An unpleasant circumstance—The perfidious traveller—The Swiss rifle
Pages 163–174

LETTER XIII.

Togan—Immense flight of Guinea fowl—My wedding-trunk deserted—Alarm of lions—The tracks visible—Mirage again—The Felik station-master—Extraordinary costume of slave girls—My slumber is disturbed—Our host says his prayers—I exclaim aloud!—A woman, a donkey, or a dog—Flattering! . . . 175–187

LETTER XIV.

Arrival at Kassala—Halting for the night—Land full of lions—A hyena intrudes—Camp aroused at five o'clock—The pioneers start—Not a tree upon the plain—We don't know the way—Off the track—On into the heart of Kassala—Completely at a loss—The Italian lady—Scouts suggested—The Pasha and officers—Charlie walks in—The fiction of Hussein Kabiri 188–204

LETTER XV.

Our host and hostess—A bountiful breakfast—Half-tamed young lions—All kinds of animals—Our hired house—Deep in dust—Cracks in the door—Inspected unawares—My new dog—The former threat—Camel-drivers punished—Arabian costumes—We explore Kassala—A "careless ordered" garden—The pauper burying-ground
205–220

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LETTER XVI.

Arrival of home letters—Fête at commandant's house—Gorgeousness and barbarism—The lady of the house—Four hundred people feasted—Vaulting on to the dais—Dinner announced—Dipping into the tureen—"Fingers before forks"—We wash our hands—Oppressive hospitality—Finjáns and zerfs—Arab coffee—Mode of grinding—Copper saucepans—Characteristic fraud . Pages 221–239

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ILLUSTRATIONS.

A Suakin Pilot	*Title-page*	
Suakin Harbour	*Page*	14
Suakin Causeway	,,	22
Our first Camping-Ground	,,	29
Debûs	,,	32
Hadendoa Arab	,,	51
Stalking Wild Asses	,,	60
Coiffure of Mutton Fat	,,	119
Camping-Ground at Wandik	,,	137
Kassala	,,	189

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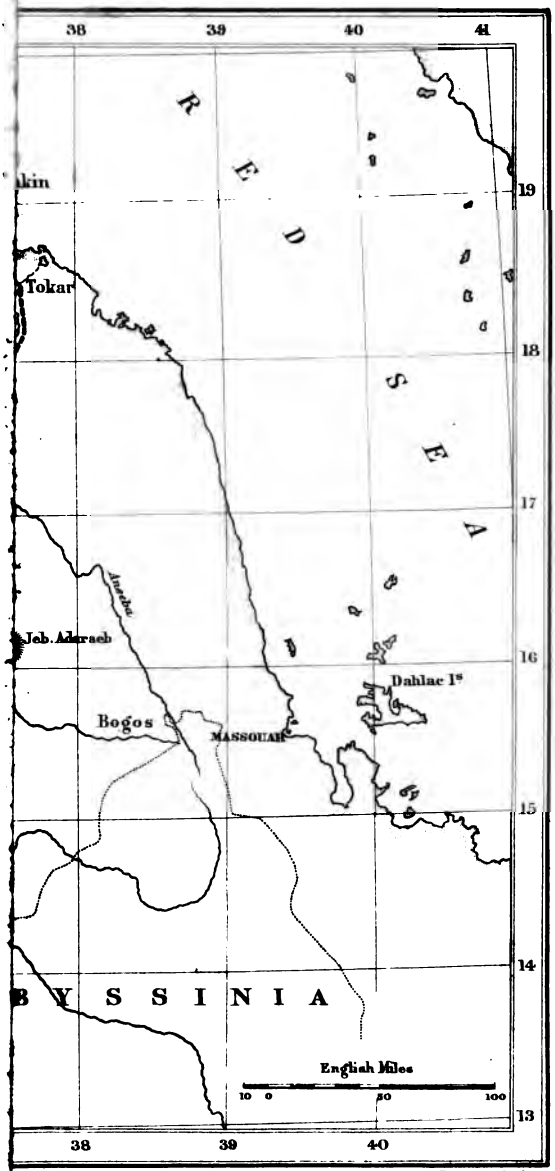

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LETTER I.

On the eve of starting—Suakin is our port—Our native staff—Englishman expected to join us—Our baggage—Home-made tents—Hospitality at Suez—Old acquaintances—Shivering with cold—Last packings.

SUEZ, *7th February* 1878.

MY DEAREST MOTHER—We are at last actually on the eve of starting for our African trip. The fortnight that has elapsed since we arrived from Penang has passed with wonderful rapidity, and we shall probably be off for the Soudan the day after to-morrow.

Suakin is our port, and from there we shall begin our marches southwards towards Kassala. I am not at all surprised that you or any of the dear folk at home do not enter into the idea as enthusiastically as we do! We feared you would all vote it a *wild* scheme, but we are ourselves so keen about the expedition that not even your kind advice can deter us, and we feel that no difficulties can daunt us! Everything has so far seemed to favour us in the most

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marvellous manner. We could not have a more promising or more happily chosen little camp had we taken the utmost pains as to selection, yet every one has come to us, as it were, almost by chance, and without any special exertion on our part. You must, therefore, abandon your misgivings, and make up your mind to rejoice with us every step of our way.

I must describe some of the principal members of our staff. We have brought a Malay boy with us from Perak, who is a clever fellow in many ways. He was our servant for a year before we left the Straits, and latterly, with a view to this tour, I taught him to do all sorts of things, and I assure you he now far surpasses his instructor! He is a good table servant—a housemaid (so to speak), valet, and lamp-man; cleans glass and china to perfection; and, in fact, is so willing and bright that he makes no objection to any sort of work. He will be invaluable, I am sure; and, besides the comfort we shall have from his services, I said before we started that I must have one servant with me to whom I could speak in a language that both he and I could understand. As I know Malay, and he is very anxious to learn English, we may have more than one ground on which

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to meet before long. Had I only Arab servants with me I should find it rather difficult to get on, at any rate until it is possible to achieve at least a smattering of the terrific Arabic gutturals. We have picked up a youth here who gives himself out as an Abyssinian, but we have our doubts on this point, as he knows little of Amharic, saying in explanation that the length of time he has been away from his country has caused him to forget it; Arabic, however, he speaks fluently, and as he can cook, and is able to act in various capacities, he gives promise of being very useful. He is strong and active, with a fine erect carriage, and a clear bright eye that looks one straight in the face, so we can but hope that he will prove as honest as he appears to be.

In addition we expect by and by an Englishman, named Connolly, who was acting temporarily as sailor on board the vessel we came in from the Malay Straits, but who wishes to leave the sea, and is ready to follow our fortunes. He went home to England with the ship, but has promised to come out to us when this voyage for which he was engaged is over, and I fancy he will keep his word. I think he will be the very man for such an enterprise,—hardy,

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accustomed to roughing it, clever, thoroughly good-natured, and very well educated; he writes a hand like a gentleman's, and can keep accounts splendidly—far better than *I* can; but then you'll laugh, and say, "*That* is not saying much!"

I am very anxious to take an Italian washer-woman who is here, and who wants to come with me. She is an exquisite laundress, and as refined in appearance and manners as a lady; and, besides washing for us, would make a nice personal attendant. Her husband would come too, and would do all sorts of odd jobs; but I have doubts after all as to whether it would be a prudent step to take them, and hardly think we shall carry out the idea.

And now I am sure you will wish to know what our baggage is. Clothes are the very least part of it; all that we do not want we shall store in the hotel here in camphor-wood boxes, and all that we take go easily into two small leather portmanteaus and two little "cabin" Chinese boxes. Nevertheless we have three tons of luggage. This is made up of rifles, guns, tents, saddles, three great boxes of odds and ends—such as medicines, jars of arsenical paste for preserving skins of birds and beasts,

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presents of gay cloths and ornaments for sheiks who may have to be propitiated with regard to the shooting, half a dozen camp chairs, forming in themselves a heavy bundle, and last, not least, our photographic apparatus, which is no light weight. Besides this I ought to mention a heavy box containing all sorts of tools—axes, saws, files, chisels, hammers, etc. etc., which will be useful for a hundred things, and will help to build our houses for the rainy season, —for we have many thoughts of remaining a year in the country, so as to get plenty of sport and see the land in every aspect.

We have three tents; one of them is an Indian tent, which we were lucky enough to find at Penang; it is thicker and stronger than the other two, which we made ourselves in Larut.

By the bye, I have never told you about *that*. It was an achievement I was very proud of! We bought the cloth in the native bazaar—substantial "American drill"—and cut out the tents ourselves, making diminutive diagrams on paper first, and taking all the measurements by an inch rule to get the right proportions. When this was done, and the material sliced up, I stitched it together with my sewing-machine!

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The little "Wilcox and Gibbs" behaved valiantly, and the long seams of *doubled stuff* were splendidly accomplished, thanks to its invaluable aid.

Then we soaked the tents in soap-suds and alum to make them waterproof, and finally had them pitched in our "compound," that we might enjoy our handiwork to our hearts' content. The poles were cut from the neighbouring jungle, and iron-bound and iron-tipped by native smiths, and promise to answer capitally.

I am going to take a donkey with me from Cairo, as it will be some time before we get into that part of the country where good riding camels can be obtained,—and donkeys are hardier and better for rough travelling than horses,—and Charlie will probably get one of the immense mules, thirteen and fourteen hands high, that are to be had here. * * *

Since writing so far we have been so strongly dissuaded from taking Europeans with us that we are more doubtful than ever about the Italians, and probably they will not be of the party.

Before I close this letter I must tell you of the great kindness we have met with in Suez during our stay here. I was quite in despair

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on our arrival to find that we had just missed the Egyptian boat to Suakin, and that we could not get away for another fortnight, but now I am quite reluctant to leave.

There is actually a small society here! consisting of five or six families, and every one has shown us the warmest hospitality.

The Consul has a charming house, full of beautiful "*curios*" and interesting things from all parts of the world. Shortly after our arrival we dined with him and Mrs. West, and had a delightful evening. Everything was first-rate, and we met many nice people. Was it not curious that among the company there was a lady who reminded Charlie that she had known him when he was a boy of about fifteen, and she was a child some four years old?

She said that he had, on the occasion of some large show in the town in which they both were staying, lifted her up in his arms, and even then held her far aloft above the heads of the surrounding crowd. He remembered the circumstance directly, and was delighted to renew the acquaintance of—we will not say *how many* years ago! These pleasant recognitions are constantly occurring. Wherever we go we are sure to come across people, or

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relations and friends of people, we have known before, and it is often a matter of speculation with me, in going down to a fresh table d'hôte, whom we shall meet next or which of our former acquaintances we shall at least hear of.

* * * *

There is an admiral here, and also a naval captain, who look after the transport ships as they go to India. They have a first-rate lawn-tennis ground on hard earth instead of grass, as *that* does not grow during the dry season, and asphalt courts have evidently not reached Suez yet. Yesterday we had a splendid game or rather "set," and are just off again for another. I shall be glad of the walk, for I am simply *freezing*, and had no idea that Suez could ever be so cold. It is possible that we who have been living in a temperature of 89° and 90°, more or less, for the last five years, are more sensitive to it than most people would be, but we feel it terribly. I had a fire lighted in the saloon—the only room in the hotel that has a stove in it—directly we arrived, and have been cowering over one almost daily. The thermometer was down to 48° when we first came, and it has fallen lower than that every night since. It once sank to 34°. By nine o'clock

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in the morning it is only 52°, and never during the day gets up beyond 70° or 72°. A sharp wind is blowing now from the sea, and I feel that I should like a fur cloak. I have fortunately been able to get a thick serge dress in the bazaar belonging to the hotel, but though I am delighting in it now it will not be very appropriate for the Soudan, and I suspect that it will be among the things left behind us here. At night I sleep under blankets and rugs, and am glad of all I can get.

We have had a charming visit to Cairo during the last fortnight, but I must not linger now to give you a description of it, as there are still a thousand things to be done in preparation for our start.

In two days more we shall say good-bye to Suez, and steam away in the little "Tor," down the Red Sea, on our way to the Soudan. The next boat will be bringing your letters to Suakin, and I shall get them, I hope, regularly, for I know you will never miss a mail, and posts go constantly down the country from Suakin to Kassala; but of all such arrangements I will tell you in my next.

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LETTER II.

The border of the terrible land—On board the "Tor"—A storm gets up—Suakin Harbour—Hospitality of the Arab Governor—Our rooms in the Pasha's house—Writing under difficulties—No bathing possible—Dinner with the Pasha—Suakin—Our proposed route to Kassala—Plans for the future.

STEAMSHIP "TOR," OFF SUAKIN,
13*th February* 1878.

AFTER a somewhat stormy passage we have reached the border of the terrible land! and are really in sight of Suakin.

We left Suez at 11 A.M. precisely on Saturday the 9th, and ought to have been in the harbour yesterday evening, but our Arab captain, with exemplary caution, would not enter at sundown, as there is much danger from shoals and sunken rocks, so kept out on the open sea all night, and early this morning "put about" to come round again.

Our last days at Suez were immensely busy. Rearranging our luggage to get it into as small a compass as possible for the coming travel,

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sorting everything, and rejecting every article that we thought it possible to do without; making arrangements for the forwarding of letters and papers, and saying good-bye to all the kind friends who had shown us so much hospitality,—ran rapidly away with the hours, and scarcely left us time for all we wished to accomplish. It was a lovely morning when we steamed away from Suez, and to us who have already been so long in hotter climates it seemed very cold. I sat on the deck of the little gunboat, wrapped up in a great fur rug and all manner of cloaks and shawls, and shivered even then. The air was crisp and fresh—the sea sparkled and shone deliciously—no atmosphere could have been more inspiriting; and if I had ever felt inclined for a moment to quake at the undertaking before me, that bright scene would have dispelled every doubt. The "Tor" is one of the Khedive's gunboats, and, for an Egyptian steamer, far nicer than anything I could possibly have anticipated. It was, after all, a lucky thing that we were not in time for the steamer of the preceding fortnight, for that would have been merely one of the ordinary passenger boats, occupied probably by hosts of Arab travellers, many of them very likely

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pilgrims, and the results of such occupation are often, as you may imagine, most undesirable!—whereas this boat, being reserved for Egyptian officials and the best class of the Khedive's employés, was tolerably clean; and as we were the only Europeans on board we had the little saloon and cabins all to ourselves. Out of the saloon the cabins opened, as in any other steamer—small single-berth cabins, just big enough for one. Had all the party whom we so fondly hoped would join us from home been there they would have found plenty of room, as there were six or seven of these cabins entirely at our disposal. No table d'hôte or food of any kind was provided, the people on board being all Arabs, consequently Mohammedans; but our Abyssinian boy cooked for us, doing the mutton to a turn! and making a curry by no means to be despised, though he had not learned that art in either an Indian or Malay kitchen; but the equivalent to a Malay curry, with all the fresh cocoa-nut in it (in my opinion surpassing any Indian curry that was ever made), could not be expected or found anywhere out of the Straits Settlements. We had laid in at Suez a stock of live fowls, nearly half a sheep, a piece of beef, and a quantity of

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tinned provisions, so we were not at a loss! For the first two days we were as happy as if in a pleasure-boat; all was delightful. The sea was as smooth as glass, and everything was prosperous, but alas! on Sunday night the wind began to rise, a heavy sea came up, and the little "Tor" rolled horribly. Everybody suffered more or less, and I really had some apprehension as to what our fate might be; for the creaky tub groaned and cracked so terrifically, and the big waves broke over her so alarmingly, that, in spite of all the bigger storms I had lived safely through in bigger vessels, I occasionally made up my mind that the final moment had come at last, and that the next staggering plunge would take us into the deep never to return. I lay in my berth and bore it as heroically as might be—for the most part in solitude and silence. It is my firm conviction that Charlie suffered too in the depths of his own cabin (though he would not own to it!), not from "apprehension," but *otherwise*. However, as it was perfectly impossible for me to sit up, much less to go in and see how he was getting on, I can make no assertions. He roused himself at intervals in his unselfish way and brought

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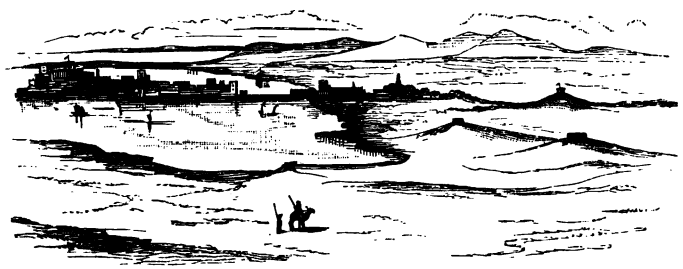
me in an orange, or strawberries in syrup, or lemon wafers, or some such little delicacy, which his kind thoughtfulness had provided for an hour of need, and I always felt after his visits that we should *certainly* survive and live to go into the Soudan; and we have survived, and here we are—and have been since nine o'clock this morning—in Suakin



SUAKIN HARBOUR.

harbour, feeling perfectly well and ready for any and every thing.

I am scribbling away on deck under the awning; we have had a hasty breakfast off cold chicken and oranges, and our baggage is being now put into boats and taken on shore, and then a search is to be made for a house, where we shall be able to remain for the next few days while getting camels and guides and preparing for our start.

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I must describe the town as it appears from a distance. It seems to be a little Arab sea-port, full of white, flat-roofed, irregularly built houses. Here and there a minaret rises, and there are one or two houses with Arabesque or Saracenic shaped windows, giving the place a pretty picturesque air. Groups of swarthy Arabs congregate at the corners of the streets, and a few fishing-boats are dotted about the harbour. I have been watching one which seems to be particularly successful; it contains but two men, or rather a man and a boy; the boy holds the rudder, the man throws the line, and almost as fast as he flings it into the water he pulls it back again with a small fish at the end; they always appear to be the same, and I should think are only about a pound in weight each. * * * *

Charlie has just returned from the shore; he has been introduced by our captain to the Arab Governor of Suakin, who has very kindly offered us rooms in his house as long as we remain here; but we shall not leave the vessel just yet, for the baggage is not quite all landed, and our live stock is still on board.

I hear my nice white donkey (such an *aris-*

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tocratic-looking donkey he is! so slim and elegant—quite a pleasure to behold) braying ever and anon in the distance, though I have my doubts as to whether *that* is an aristocratic accomplishment, in spite of his elegant appearance; and the two pointers which we bought at Suez bark now and then vociferously, as they get frightened perhaps, poor dogs, by a crowd of natives near them.

Charlie did not get a mule, as he at one time intended to do, determining to ride a camel instead; and we did not bring the Italians after all, so we are as yet but seven.

"We are seven!"—Charlie, myself, Sher Ullah the Malay boy, Ahmed the Abyssinian, my donkey not yet named, and Shot and Flora the pointers.

I must now wait till we get on shore, as the narrative of the ship seems to be pretty well exhausted, and the wind besides is blowing my paper to distraction, not to say *destruction.*

PASHA'S HOUSE, SUAKIN,
14th, Thursday.

I was not able to write more yesterday, and as we hope to leave this in a day or two, I shall keep my letter open till just as we are starting,

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adding to it daily, so that you may have the whole Suakin budget all at once.

The rooms which the Pasha has kindly given us are my first bit of African "roughing it," though after the Malay hut and the wooden shanty at Larut they seem *palatial!* These rooms are perfectly bare, not a stick of furniture in them, no covering on the floor, not a hanging of any kind,—that perhaps, considering all that might possibly abide in hangings, may be considered a comfort. The house itself is a mansion composed of mud walls covered over with a sort of whitewash stucco both inside and out. The roughest of unhewn beams, with matting (in which there are mighty gaps) stretched over them, form the ceiling. Such a big, bare, rambling place, it is altogether as primitive as you can imagine. Not a peg to hang a hat upon, not a shelf, or the ghost of a recess. From the whitewashed walls the plaster tumbles down in showers if one attempts to drive a nail in; there are windows, but these being simply badly-made "venetians," and our room looking right on to the sea, where a cold wind is blowing cruelly to-day, the draughts are fearful. This is increased by three large slits in the wall at the top of the room, exactly opposite the windows,

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not covered in or protected at all, and for no purpose in the world that we can imagine. An adjoining room is occupied by our servants, and a large empty sort of vault-like hall (all in the same style) outside by our dogs. There also the cooking goes on (on a few bricks on the stucco floor). Our boxes, camp-chairs, and mattresses form our furniture.

I am writing at intervals between again rearranging the luggage and resting. Unless you could behold the position you could scarcely realise the difficulties, so I must beg you to be lenient as to errors and deficiencies.

To begin with, I have no table, so my writing-case is on my knee; secondly, the wind is almost equal to being out in the open air; thirdly, interruptions of every kind are momently occurring; fourthly, I have just upset the ink, which was balanced on the edge of a camp-stool; and fifthly, sixthly, seventhly, I might continue *ad libitum*, but I will not weary you or waste my time with the catalogue. We have had to unpack almost every box, for they were found as they were to be far too weighty for a continuous march; and by making bundles of some things sewn up in matting, and taking rifles and other things from boxes for men to

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carry, we have been able to reduce the weight to the proper porportions for balancing on the camels. "Ce n'est que le premier pas qui coute;" one has to remember *that* continually, or one would feel rather at one's wit's end sometimes, with regard to this continual packing and repacking; nevertheless I have a sort of faint misgiving, which will crop up now and then, that there may be other "pas" which will "coute" also by and by; but I have not yet begun to waver for a moment, or repented of my having persuaded Charlie to bring me to Africa.

I had hard work to do it, you know; he was so utterly reluctant that I should go through all this sort of thing; but I shall ever be proud to remember that I suggested and planned the tour, and got my way about coming too; but then you'll be sure to say, "*I* am not surprised at that!"

What I miss most of all is my tub. Bathing appears to be an insurmountable difficulty; there is positively no washing apparatus of any kind to be procured larger than a small terra-cotta vase, and the supply of water is in proportion. I cannot even go down to the river, as I used to in Perak when first we went into the jungles

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there, because there is no river to go to, and no nice large bushes, with their deep cool shade to screen me, as I had then. I am longing to get into our tents in the open country, and when we are inland we shall be out of this terrific sea-breeze, and able to use our baths in the bath tents which we have brought with us.

I have got a splendid Indiarubber bath, for which I wrote home to Shoolbred as soon as I knew we were coming here, and he sent me out a beauty; it is too tantalising to think that it lies packed away as yet in the depths of a box.

The Pasha (I suppose one ought to spell the title with a big "P") invited us to dine with him the first night of our arrival, and we accepted the invitation. I had much trepidation at the outset as to what the order of things would be, —whether we should be expected to eat with our fingers, and whether the dishes would be eatable or not. To our surprise we found a capital dinner, knives and forks, and even a table-cloth. Dinner was served *à la Russe*, the meat being cut in the background, and fruit and flowers only on the table. The soup savoured somewhat of a "mess of pottage" certainly, and was handed round to each person in the tureen, and the chicken, which was excellent and well

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cooked, was sliced up in gigantically hospitable portions; but everything was good, wholesome, and not to be despised, and far exceeded our expectations. The other guests were the captain of the "Tor" and an Arab who spoke French capitally. This was charming, for we carried on a most animated conversation in that language—the man's interest about England and everything English being extremely keen.[1] He asked a hundred questions about our queen, government, country, and laws, and was interested in all we told him.

We made our adieu about half-past ten, and when we returned to our own rooms, on the sea side of the house, we found that the wind had increased to such a gale that to sleep without shelter would be impossible, so by dint of hammer, nails, and ropes we erected one of our small tents inside the room. We could not manage to put it up quite as it ought to have gone, but it answered the purpose admirably, and I passed the snuggest night under it I have had for some time. I shall allow the tent to remain in the room until we start, for I use it as a boudoir by day and have made it quite pretty.

[1] I have always found this to be the case with Arabs who are at all educated.

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I must not forget to tell you that we went out this morning to explore the town. Suakin is an island, and when we begin our journey south we shall have to go across to the

SUAKIN CAUSEWAY.

mainland in boats; they are talking about making a causeway across, for it is only a few hundred yards to the opposite shore, but Arabs talk and talk for ages before the faintest sign of action comes on, so when the causeway will be accomplished is hard to say.[1]

The town is just as it appeared from the harbour, a quiet, quaint little Arab sea-port, but picturesque, as most Eastern towns are,

[1] Since then, as is now well known, the causeway has been made. It was finished, to my surprise, when I returned from the Soudan in the following July.

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with a couple of mosques and a small fort, a fine old gateway, and lots of warehouses for the Arab merchants. There are one or two Italian merchants also in the place, and the bazaar is a bright, pretty scene.

The graceful Eastern costumes, the large turbans of the men, the bits of brilliant colouring in all that is worn, the Turkish fez, the dark-blue dresses of most of the women, with the odd contrivances they sometimes have for concealing their faces—all mingle together in a strange fascinating manner which has a great charm for me.

I long to be able to sit down and draw and paint every person that passes and every nook that I see, and in parts of the world like these I grieve over my imperfect powers in that line more than I can express.

Still, in spite of the novelty, a few days at Suakin will be more than sufficient, and I earnestly hope we shall get away soon, before *that* begins to wear off and the uneventfulness to pall.

You must not be at all anxious about us or think that we have got beyond the reach of recall, though we *are* going into the "wilds." There is a constant post from here to Kassala,

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for which we are bound, and letters addressed to the "Post Office, Suez," will always be forwarded to us. There are telegraph wires also to Kassala, and indeed over most of that part of Africa which we shall be travelling in.

We shall keep along the route of the wires, travelling from "mohatta"—that is, police station—to "mohatta," and marching from the wells at one place to the wells at the next; and those stations and wells will, in the main, determine the distances of our marches.

I shall date my letters from the stations we stop at, and you must get a good atlas and look out all the places, but as they are very little known except to hunters who come for sport, I fear you may have some difficulty in finding them.

Kassala (it may be spelt with a C in the map), which is about two hundred and seventy miles from Suakin, in lat. 15°20′ south, long. 36°15′ east, is to be our headquarters. It will probably take us twelve or fifteen days to reach it from Suakin, doing about twenty miles a day, for the baggage camels are slow travellers, moving at the rate, I am told, of only about two or two and a half miles an hour.

There are twelve "mohattas" between this

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and Kassala, so we shall constantly be near to Government people *of some sort*, and not out of the reach of assistance should we need it.

I really feel that, what with these stations and the telegraph to Massowa, Kartoum, Berber, and many other places, we shall be quite in the centre of civilisation! and as to the distance from home, we are far nearer than we were in the Straits or India. We could return at any time, if we wished, far quicker than we shall now go, when there is no special necessity for hurrying or making forced marches.

Our plan is to get a house at Kassala, stow our goods in it, and camp out in the neighbourhood for shooting; this is our present idea, but no doubt it will be altered, as time goes on and circumstances change, fifty times!

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LETTER III.

Everything ready for a start—My first acquaintance with Hadendoa Arabs—Our start from Suakin—Dinner by moonlight—Debûs, the native hound—Skins for holding water—I meet three hundred camels—"Beni-Amer" Arabs—Afternoon tea under a mimosa bush—We sleep out of doors—Flora's midnight visit—We reach "Sātrāb."

SUAKIN,
18th February 1878, 7 A.M.

THE sixth day since reaching Suakin, and we are not off yet; however, I heartily hope and half believe that a start may be effected about noon. All the boxes were packed, corded, and arranged in appropriate loads for the camels yesterday, and now, while waiting for breakfast, I am commencing my last scribble from here.

There has been endless trouble about procuring the camels, and the Pasha, in spite of his hospitality, has, we think, treated us somewhat shabbily in the matter. I suppose it is only the habitual and inherent laziness, insouciance, and dilatoriness of the Eastern, but it drives *me* half wild, and even Charlie's long-

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suffering forbearance is put to a severe test. On Friday "His Honour" wholly refused to move at all in the matter, declining to receive any message or give any order on the subject, as it was his day of prayer.

He went to the mosque with great parade in the morning, surrounded by an innumerable multitude of the seediest-looking followers you can imagine, and smoked himself stupid all the afternoon, and of course nothing in our behalf was done.

On Sunday morning, to our extreme aggravation, we heard him depart at early dawn in the "Tor," for Massowa; the splashing of the boat which took him off to the vessel sounded quite impertinent to our incensed ears, as it struck almost against our very venetians, and roused us to make a more desperate and determined appeal than ever to the deputy-Pasha, who was left behind.

At last, after infinite struggles, we gained our cause, and engaged our men and animals; and, if they do not play us truant, they are to be here by nine o'clock (but probably it will be eleven ere they appear) to weigh and take away the baggage.

12 A.M. (noon).—They actually did come,

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but not till ten. It was the first sight I have had of real live Hadendoa Arabs, and *such sights* as they are! Strongly built, but not very tall specimens these happened to be, with shock heads never to be realised unless seen.

Part of their hair, the upper part, stands out in an enormous frizz, like a perfect bush, and as broad as a wide-spreading hat all round their heads, and the lower part hangs down in innumerable little curls, all rolled up in mutton fat! An immense wooden-skewer is stuck through the bush on top, the purpose of which I will leave to your own imagination, simply adding that the mutton fat is repeatedly renewed, and the erection allowed to remain *in statu quo* for unknown periods, when the whole is shaved off (as the only available remedy for all evils) preparatory to growing again! Charlie tells me that a similar custom and similar weapons, but made of gold or silver, are used by the ladies in Abyssinia; the innumerable small plaits into which their hair is periodically twisted subjecting them to like inconveniences. After full two hours of shouting and squabbling, first with each other, and then with us—objecting to everything, lifting up each box at least three times over, and putting them all down

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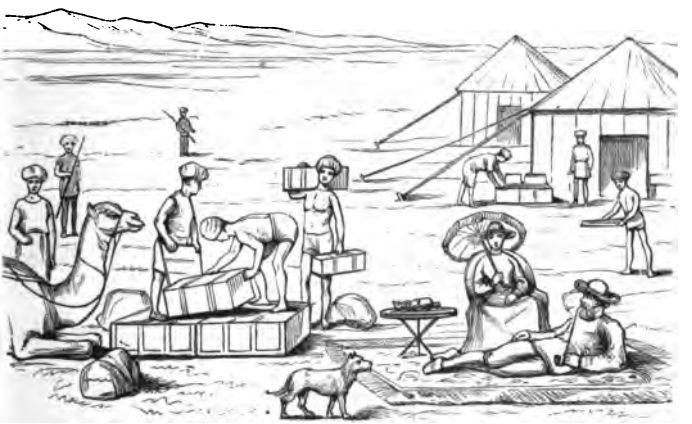
again in the most hopeless dogged manner, trying to argue for higher wages than had been already agreed upon, and in general "showing an ugly front"—we got the men to move.



OUR FIRST CAMPING-GROUND.

(I am now writing at 8 P.M. by moonlight.) It is a glorious night, the moon is simply a magnificent blaze, and, with my good sight, I find the light quite sufficient for scribbling by. They are putting up the little tent, for we have already halted only a few miles outside the town, but the great thing has been to make the start, and to feel that we are fairly off.[1]

1 The place where we encamped the first night must have been close to the very spot, if not actually on it, where the battle of Tamanieb so lately took place.

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It was past one o'clock before the baggage was across the inlet, and laid beside the kneeling camels, who were groaning, screeching, and snarling; reaching round their long necks, trying to bite either men or boxes, and carrying on that most hideous din, which baggage camels, while being laden, alone are capable of; and it was almost 4 P.M. before we were actually *en route*. Our party consisted of twenty-one camels, eight camel-drivers, our two selves, five servants, an Arab traveller (who has asked to be allowed to take advantage of our escort as far as Kassala), the dogs, and now two donkeys. We bought a black, common, and most plebeian-looking ass—yet the best we could get—at Suakin, for our Malay servant, who strongly objects to camels, and is not accustomed to much walking. The superiority of my white Cairo donkey is quite remarkable, and forms a striking feature in the history of that race of animals!

We have just had dinner too, by moonlight, out in the open air. If anything could make that meal romantic, surely our present situation has done so. The breeze, soft as it is, was too strong for candles, and we did not get out lanterns, as we shall be off again early to-

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morrow morning; besides, who would choose artificial light inside a tent in preference to this glorious moon and the fresh air outside!

For the next few days we shall be marching pretty rapidly, as there is no game whatever in this part of the country (it is far too much traversed by caravans), and our great object is to get on without unnecessary delay to the south.

Charlie is having his last cigarette, sitting on a rug on the ground with his back against some piled up boxes, supremely content with the present condition of things and the coming prospect, and I am just going to "turn in," so good-night, and good-bye for to-day.

Sātrāb, 21st, Thursday.—I must tell you of our first real march and my sleeping in the open air for the first time. It was delicious; the novelty atoned for everything that could possibly have been construed into a trouble, and I felt quite a heroine!

We did not get off from our first camping-ground till noon on Tuesday—the camel men had it all their own way that morning, for, being still within sight of Suakin, it was feared that severe measures might cause them to bolt; so, in spite of our having roused the camp before 6 A.M., we were obliged to con-

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tent ourselves after breakfast with going out in company with two or three Arab "loafers" who were about, to look for hares, partridges, or any small game that might be found on the plain.

It was a lovely morning, and I walked about three miles; though Charlie got away much farther; but the ground was very uneven, and I found it tiring. As we returned to the tents, the men were just bringing in the camels, and while they were being laden, up came

DEBÛS.

some other Arabs from a neighbouring village with a fine dog for sale. He is a great big deep-chested fellow, a wonderfully swift hound, and very good, they say, at pulling down wounded deer; so, after much consideration of his qualities,

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and not a little "haggling" with the salesmen, who of course at the outset asked at least three times more than he was worth, we struck a bargain, and he is now part and parcel of our camp, and a great ally of mine. His name is Debûs. We got a quantity of fresh milk too from these men, but I fear it is the last place at which we shall get cow's milk for some time to come, as they tell us that farther south goat's and camel's milk is for the most part the order of the day. The milk was brought to us in bags made of goat skins. These skins are very useful for carrying drinkables in, and water kept in them is always deliciously cool. This is because the leather is porous. As the water percolates to the surface, the wind cools the sack, and consequently the water. In those skins, however, that milk is put into, the porosity is destroyed, as the oleaginous particles fill up the pores and prevent percolation, and when dry they are stiff and hard. Those in which water is kept, on the contrary, are always humid; in fact, glistening wet. The natives tell us that for a long journey in any part of the country which is without water very large skins (called "*girbas*") made of ox hide are used, and these girbas are tarred to keep in every drop. On

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halting they are opened, and the smaller skins filled, that the water may become cool before drinking it.

At half-past one we started for the next camping-ground, Charlie on the only hajeen (*i.e.* riding camel) he could procure at Suakin, which, though infinitely extolled by the drivers, is a very rough beast; and I trotting alongside on my energetic little donkey, which has a brisk pace, quite in accordance with my own tastes!—I feel on looking up to the height above me like a mouse by the side of a mountain, and long to mount a "hajeen" of my own, which I hope to do as soon as we reach Kassala, and a good one can be procured. We went on, followed by Sher Ullah on his donkey and Ahmed on foot, till we came to a place where Charlie thought he might possibly get a shot at something, so leaving the track he diverged to the right, telling me to keep straight on, and saying he would rejoin me at a point agreed upon, near the horizon!

I soon lost sight of him, but as the road was tolerably well indicated by camel tracks, I hoped that we should not lose it, and went steadily ahead. By and by I became tired of riding, and got off to walk, giving my donkey

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into Ahmed's care. We had not gone far before an immense drove of camels came in sight; I was told there were about three hundred. They belonged to merchants coming up from Kassala, and were chiefly laden with wheat; many, however, had no burdens at all; many were young ones, running along by the side of their mothers, with their long straggling legs seeming to go in every direction; many were great big old veterans, ugly and dirty with age and toil.

They came along in the most promiscuous manner, and in no order at all, spreading all over the plain, and often filling up the path completely. That, however, was not of much consequence, as there was nothing to prevent one from going to either side. You must not imagine our road was an English lane, in between nicely-trimmed hedges; it was simply a track across a desert, as it was all the way to Kassala, and is all over the Soudan. I did not feel in the least afraid of these big creatures, though they were so numerous; they looked so gentle and stupid, and often stopped quite still to stare at me with their great big eyes, and to wonder what I was. Doubtless I may have been an object of curiosity to them, as I

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suppose their acquaintance with English women is not extensive. I wound my way in and out and amongst them, just as I found room, and made note of them, in return for their reflections about myself. I observed their drivers, too, with interest; there were not above twenty of them, I think; they were all Arabs, but I did not feel sure about their belonging to the same tribe as our drivers; they appeared to me to be taller and bigger, and I think must have been "Beni-Amer" men, who I believe are a finer race than the Hadendoas. They saluted us in a friendly manner as they passed, and uttered some unintelligible words, doubtless meant for a kindly greeting. Shortly after this Charlie came up with us again, sooner than I expected, and at five o'clock what do you think we did? I know you will guess! We sat down under a mimosa bush, and had a cup of tea! I said I must take my afternoon tea into the desert, whatever else I left behind, and so I did. We made the camel kneel down, took off the rug which was over the saddle, and spread it on the ground, collected sticks, lighted a fire in two minutes, boiled our little copper kettle, filled with water out of a skin hung to the saddle, and put the tea into the boiling

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water. If you drink tea which only boils for a minute, or less, it is excellent, and the flavour, in my opinion, is not one bit destroyed—in the midst of the desert, at least, it was palatable enough. Everything that was wanted had been slung to the saddle—a skin of milk, cups, even saucers and spoons, and a tin of Huntley and Palmer's "oval thin captains"—and I can truly say I never enjoyed a cup of afternoon tea more than that on the Suakin plain. By the time we had finished, the baggage camels came up, and on we all went again till about 10 P.M., when we reached a "khor," or dry watercourse, a sort of little shallow valley, where we were to encamp that night. The camels were unladen, fires were lighted, the natives began to cook their food, and our supper was prepared by the excellent Ahmed. As it was a perfectly fine night, and we were to start as early as possible next morning, I would not have the tent pitched, wishing to avoid everything that would cause a delay, so our mattresses (without bedsteads) were spread down about eleven o'clock on the smoothest place that could be found; and sheltered by a friendly "mimosa," not yet wholly devoid of leaves, I made my toilette, sleeping in ordinary night apparel, with a dark

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merino dressing-gown in addition. It was all so strange and novel that I shall never forget it! It was so odd to be gazing up to the stars when one ought to have been going to sleep—to look out from one's pillow on to the dying embers of the camp fires, to have boxes and baggage piled upon the ground close to one's bed, to hear at a short distance the subdued voices of the camel men as they smoked their hookas before lying down, to get stray whiffs of their tobacco now and then, or to see their dark figures occasionally moving to and fro in the dim light—that for a long time sleep seemed as far from me as the stars were, and at last I began to think that I should get up at five o'clock in the morning without having had a wink. However, by and by drowsiness came, and I was just on the point of falling asleep when what do you think happened? I felt my forehead and cheek lightly yet most distinctly *licked!* Visions of hyenas and even lions flashed before me in an instant, and I started up electrified—to find, however, only our dear dog "Flora" standing close beside my pillow. She had somehow got loose, and, being the most affectionate creature in the world, had run over to pay me a visit, and to assure me

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she was keeping watch! She was soon led back to her own quarters, but I need not assure you that our mutual friendship was cemented from that hour.

It would weary you, and be useless, were I to go into the details of yesterday's march; they were much the same as those of the day before, except that we got away about six in the morning, did not meet camels, halted at noon for lunch, which we carried in a "tiffin" basket, and again, *of course*, for five o'clock tea! At 7.30 we reached the first "mohatta," called "Sātrāb," the place from which I am now writing. It was getting quite dark, so we did not go into the village, but had a tent pitched just outside; and after dinner I went to bed at once, for I had walked miles during the day, and was very tired.

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LETTER IV.

Mail goes regularly to Cairo—A refreshing stream—The righteous wrath of my husband—We leave Sātrāb—Travelling in the dark—Fear of hyenas—The Malay on the black donkey—"Zaituna," "Elfie," and "Fairy"—Refractory camel drivers—I am famishing.

SHANKRAT, *22d February.*

WE had a tiring march this morning, but it is now only 5 P.M., and I am so much refreshed by a good rest, a good dinner, and, need I add, a cup of *tea!* that I feel quite equal to writing away for the next hour or two, and will therefore commence another budget.

I hear that a mail is to be made up this evening from the mohatta, and am anxious to take advantage of it: at any rate I can post my last, which is still waiting to go. The mail takes the police reports which are forwarded regularly to Cairo; and they are, I fancy, almost the only letters that it does take. I cannot imagine these poor natives having correspondence of any kind, or even knowing of the existence of such a faculty.

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"I think I forgot to tell you that Sātrāb, where my last letter was finished from, is about thirty-six miles from Suakin. We had reached it at dark, and I was curious to have a look at our surroundings by daylight. I heard with delight that there was a clear running stream not far off, so as soon as we had breakfasted we set out in search of it. The wind was blowing smartly, hurling sand and dust in every direction, and as the ground was very rough and uneven this increased the difficulty of getting along.

However, I was determined to find the stream; the thought of running water in the midst of all that dry and thirsty land was so delicious I seemed to be able to hear it, by anticipation, before the sound actually reached me! We got to it after about twenty minutes' toil, and I sat down under the shade of an overhanging bit of rock, and rejoiced. The water was disappointingly shallow, but as clear as crystal, and running rapidly; there was nothing sluggish about it, and that was a comfort. You know how I dislike sluggish things (and people too, I fear!).

The dogs plunged in at once, though it was scarcely deep enough for them to get a bath,

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and after we had rested a long time, and enjoyed the shelter from the hot wind which was blowing up above, we went down to the brink and dabbled our hands in the water, and did a little *laundry* work!—washing half a dozen pocket handkerchiefs, and spreading them out on the rocks to dry. The chance was too precious a one to lose. I did not know when I should get a handkerchief washed again!

About twelve o'clock we reluctantly wended our way back to the tents, expecting to find the camels laden,—and the men waiting to set out. Fond delusion!—neither men nor camels were to be even seen, and it was long before the former were with difficulty raked up out of the village, where they had gone to make merry with their countrymen several hours before.

They at once told us that the camels had "strayed,"— an old and favourite story with Hadendoa drivers, we had previously been told, whenever they wished to stray themselves,—and they represented the matter of finding them as so hopeless that the only thing they could suggest was that they should themselves return to the village until such time as the camels elected to return to the camp. But this time the brave Hadendoas were a little

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mistaken in their reckoning;—the pent up, righteous wrath of my exasperated husband, which had been carefully stowed away for many days, at last broke forth, and the effect was such that the drivers did *not* return to the village, but that the camels *did* return to the camp in a very brief period, and that we set out on our march about an hour and a half afterwards.

At that first station I sat down in a grass hut while the camels were being laden, and after writing to you helped to clean the rifles! It was not the first time I have done this; *that*, I am sure you know, — and I dare say it will not be the last; but the one I then took in tow happened to be a particularly good one, and we were afraid to trust it with any native. Charlie was himself occupied in the same way—so we were both busy.

The country all around Sātrāb is rough and broken; there are low hills and shallow ravines everywhere; the ground is rocky and sandy alternately, and the travelling was consequently hard and fatiguing. The start on leaving it was up a very steep little gorge, with such immense boulders of stone in the way that my poor donkey had really hard work to wedge

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himself in among, or over them. I had serious thoughts of getting off and climbing for myself, I felt so sorry for poor "Prince" (for "Prince" I have named him, as he is indeed the prince of donkeys), but the fable of the man carrying his ass came to my mind, and got the better of my compassion. That bit was not long, though it certainly was rough; and when we got on to the level again, it was only stony, not rocky.

We went on at a brisk pace in front of the baggage camels, and so managed to get our tea as usual before they came up; but this time we had much ado to boil the kettle,—there was so very little wood to be found, the country being utterly bare—no mimosas even about that part; and when with difficulty we had collected a little heap and lighted a fire, the wind blew it all out again, and we were at first baffled.

We triumphed in the end, however, and had our reward. It is such a curious thing to have found out by one's own experience what invaluable articles wood and water are. One hears from one's childhood about these being almost the first necessities of man's life, but never realises (at least I never did), while

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every ordinary need is supplied without any effort of one's own, that they *are* necessities. Come into the desert, or the jungle, and one soon knows what the want of them means; their absence *there* might bring almost starvation, even if one could procure game for food, as no cooking can be done without them; but I found out all this in Larut five years ago.

Darkness fell upon us long before we had done our march; and I own to having had my first bit of real discomfort that evening. It became excessively cold, the wind blew horribly. "Prince" stumbled over the rough stony ground continually, and to my dismay we suddenly came upon a piece of land as full of mimosas as the other part had been bare. It was very cloudy, and the moon, which was only just rising, was almost entirely obscured; we could scarcely see each other, and could not keep the line which the baggage camels were going in.

I was often not aware of the bushes till I was upon them, and suddenly I felt a tremendous tug at my shoulder, and had a warm plaid shawl which was wrapped round me nearly torn off. A gigantic crooked thorn had buried its barbed point deep into it! If I had been

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a man I think I should have felt very much inclined to do what the captain in "Pinafore" was accused of doing, or said he "never did"—I forget which; as it was, I requested the party in *angelic* tones to *stop*—and extricated myself as well as might be from my difficulty.

The telegraph wires were often so low, too, that Charlie had his troubles with them. Mounted on his tall "hajeen" he now and then got badly hit by coming right across one; and, very provokingly, in this way the sight of one of his rifles which he was carrying got knocked off. However, with his faculty for tinkering and carpentering, and by the aid of the tool-box, the evil was repaired next day, and no one would have known that the misfortune had happened.

I was thankful when we reached the camping-ground, but it was past eleven o'clock, and by the time a tent was pitched it was too late, and we were too tired, to think of having anything cooked. However, we got some eggs boiled, opened a tin of sardines, and, with biscuits and hot coffee, made a capital supper. Had we had meat, it would have been *gazelle chops!*—procured on the march.

The next six or seven hours were passed in

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happy oblivion. I had not dispensed with the tent that night; three strong reasons urging me to have it put up. One was the half gale that was blowing, from which I desired shelter; another the cold; and the last, and by no means the least, an unpleasant apprehension as to hyenas, of which the drivers assured us there were many in that neighbourhood!

This morning we were again up betimes, and off upon the road by eight, or soon after. We started as usual with the camels, but also as usual soon got ahead of them. I ought to tell you that our private retinue has greatly increasd since leaving Suakin, and we have now a motley crew of *faithful* (?) followers, picked up at isolated villages we have passed through. I find that each member of this little band is profoundly jealous of the other, that each is hourly vying as to which can curry most favour with us, and that, under this condition of feeling, we are at present the happy recipients of plenty of attention. As this jealousy very much amuses me, and does not disturb my mental equilibrium in the least, I do not attempt to stop it; indeed, such an effort would be wholly futile.

Among these new-comers is a bright little lad of about fourteen, as keen as a "London

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Arab": one can indeed scarcely believe him to be a veritable *Desert* Arab; his real name is Ali, but among his companions he goes—I know not why—by the appellation of "*Biri Biri;*" and the ludicrous sound is diverting. This boy does all manner of odd jobs, but the employment that has hitherto pleased him most has been to run behind the black donkey, while Sher Ullah is riding it, and, by judicious "reminders" with a smart little cane, keep the pace, which otherwise would degenerate into a literal crawl, up to the mark.

This is really necessary, as the Malay seems to be utterly incapable of producing the desired effect by any efforts of his own, and "Biri Biri," having the keenest delight in a joke, has found it agreeable to combine duty with pleasure. Watching his opportunity he has rushed up at the moments when both donkey and rider have appeared to be on the verge of slumber, and by an unexpected stroke has urged the donkey forward with such alacrity that the Malay has been on more than one occasion sent over his head, and left sprawling on the ground, while "Biri Biri's" peals of ringing laughter have been perfectly irresistible.

Sher Ullah is the most good-natured youth

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I ever met, and has picked himself up with such unfeigned good temper, laughing also, that I do not think it fair this should occur again, and have intimated that it must not do so. Another acquisition is a very swarthy but handsome fellow of about twenty, called "Hussein," who attaches himself in the most devoted manner to *me;* and throws out innumerable hints, to which I systematically present the utmost obtuseness, as to the "*bakshish*" and new clothes that he expects in return on his arrival at Kassala. He must long ago have come to the conclusion, if he takes me as a specimen, that English women are dull creatures, to whom it is utterly useless to speak in parables. Yet his pertinacity continues; in the faint hope, I suppose, that a glimmering of his meaning may some day force its way upon my darkened mind.

The others, half a dozen or so, who act as tent pitchers, gun carriers, and in any sort of capacity, are of no special note, and I scarcely know them by name. We have also three more dogs, bought at one of the villages I have alluded to. One of these is such an elegant, graceful creature, almost as swift as Debûs, and a good game dog too. Her name is Zaituna. She is half wild yet, and frightfully shy, but I

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am trying to civilise her, and making a little progress.

The other two are quite young—that is, only half grown; they will be very large by and by, but at present they are thin, long, tall and lanky, like most half-grown animals. I intend to feed them up, and hope to see them develop into fine creatures. We call them Elfie and Fairy. But I must go back and tell you of our journey to this mohatta of Shankrat, and what befell me on the road.

It is about twenty-four miles or more from Sātrāb, and we had some fifteen miles to come this morning, having done about nine yesterday evening. After we had been a couple of hours on the way Charlie as usual went off to look for game, giving me special directions on no account to go beyond the station when I arrived at it, but to wait for him there, assuring me he would come to it, and I was not to allow the camels either, to go farther when they came up. We had ridden quickly, and had got over nearly half the distance in the cool morning, when he left me, taking with him three or four of our "select company"; but Sher Ullah, "Biri Biri," Ahmed, one or two others, and most of the dogs, remained with me.

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We went on and on, and it became hotter and hotter as the day advanced, and I had got off my donkey several times, and halted for a quarter of an hour at a time under a bush, when, after several hours travelling of this sort, we came, to my surprise and joy, suddenly upon the station. I could scarcely believe it was the

HADENDOA ARAB.

right one, but being assured that it really was "Shankrat" I again dismounted, halted under a tree, and waited for either camels or Charlie. I did not go into the village, fearing that if I did so, I might perhaps miss them. It was not long before the camels hove in sight, but to my surprise the men did not stop, and the long

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line began to wind past me. I got up and vociferated in my broken Arabic, and made signs that they were to halt, and sent for the head man of the drivers to speak to me. He came, but either would not or did not understand—afterwards I found it was would not—and passed on. There, however, I had promised to stop, and there I stopped, sitting down with indignant determination again under the tree. I kept my faithful (now *really* faithful) little crew near me, and saw every baggage camel vanish in the distance. Half an hour after, Charlie came up; he said I was perfectly right to have stopped, and that the men were perfectly wrong to have gone on, and, vowing a little vengeance on their return, started off a "runner" to bring them back. An hour nearly went by, when the man returned saying it was quite impossible to stop them; they were bent on going to a farther halting-ground, and would not return. Then two of the police were sent, and in another hour, frightened and subdued by the official command, they were at the station.

What the reason of their obstinacy had been we never fathomed; they did not half suffer for it as they deserved, but I firmly believe that

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nothing could ever modify the obstinacy and self-will of a Hadendoa camel driver.

I was famishing by the time we were able to get the lunch basket and cooking pots, and never did I enjoy a dinner more than the one we have just finished. A roast fowl, curry and rice, a tin of "Crosse and Blackwell's" excellent "tunny fish," and preserved asparagus, have been keenly appreciated, and naught but the bones has been left for the dogs. I am sure you will say that we take good care of ourselves, but how we generally get our meals, and what they are spread on, I must reserve for another letter.

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LETTER V.

Letters instead of diary—A cure for nervous invalids—Stones under my pillow—Wild asses in sight—A long shot—Bargains with myself—Cold mornings and evenings—The scorching wind—The sentry asleep—Retribution falls on the guide.

LAGUA, 24*th February* 1878.

I OFTEN feel dreadfully tempted, when sitting down to write, to tell you of the incidents which have immediately occurred, without going back to those of the previous days; but if I were to do this I feel sure I should never pick up the past thread; and as you wanted me to tell you "everything that happened," I must resist this impulse and proceed regularly with the account of our travel. I keep no diary, or next to none; almost the utmost that I do is to jot down the names of the places we arrive at, for I much prefer writing letters, and I have not time for both. It is so much nicer to tell all one's doings to those who care to hear of them than to put them down in a book merely

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for one's self! Writing letters is like talking to a friend, though I am almost sometimes afraid that what may seem full of interest to me may be wearisome in its minuteness to you; but I won't waste moments with preliminaries or apologies. We are having nearly a whole day's rest, and so I shall have time for a nice long chat.

After the fatigues and worries at Shankrat were over, and after my letter to you was finished, I felt pretty well "done up," and took advantage of our halt to go early to bed. Certainly one benefit arising from travelling in the desert is, that if you are not over tired it makes you sleep like a top! I have never before slept 'one quarter as well as I do now. At home and in other countries, in ordinary life, I have always been fearfully wakeful; but here there is no time to be wakeful, or to think about whether one's pillow is comfortable or not! Every moment for repose has to be utilised, or the next fatigue will be upon one before one is ready for it! The mattress on the ground makes no difference—it is a trifle not worth a thought; the thing is to lie down upon it, and go to sleep straight off.

I believe if half the nervous invalids in

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England could come to the Soudan for a few weeks, they would go home absolutely well, and cured of "*nerves*" for the rest of their lives. The fine dry air is so perfectly healthy too, I feel that every hour of it is as yet doing me good; there is no damp whatever, which is such a great matter. Nevertheless, in spite of this we always have our waterproof sheets laid down first, and then the mattresses. These are about two inches thick, stuffed with cotton wool, somewhat of the nature of a "flock," but they have not got into *lumps* yet, and I don't think they will: I had them well quilted to prevent it before we left Penang; then comes a deliciously soft woollen Indian blanket, yet not a blanket exactly either; it is made of camel's hair, and was manufactured at Lahore, and is of the most exquisite texture; another of the same kind goes over me, and various rugs complete the coverings: Charlie's arrangements are much of the same description.

I have not seen a sheet since we left the hotel at Suez on the 9th, and shall not I suppose until I arrive at that same port again; but I have a good supply of pillow-cases, and am looking forward to the next stream, when I shall make the Malay do a little more

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laundry-work. The bedding is rolled up in matting, with a stout "ox-hide" bound securely all round to prevent tearing in going through the thorny bushes, and these ox-hide bundles are slung to one of the baggage camels, so the preparations for the night do not, when once a tent is erected, take very long,—there being nothing to do but untie the bundles and let down the rolls.

You will be amused to hear that I have on several occasions felt, on lying down, what I was certain was a large stone just under my ear, but have been too utterly tired to rouse up and get it removed, and have gone to sleep while thinking about it! In the morning, when the things have been taken up, there has been the stone in the ground, covered over with sand or earth, so that it was not seen when they were laid down.

I promised to tell you how we got our meals; any and every way! When we halt long enough to make it worth while, a box is brought up from the baggage quarter, and the dishes, etc., are spread upon it. Sometimes, however, they are put on an "angréb." Ah! I forgot, you don't know what that is; (a native bedstead), and a primitive construction it is.

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Just four pieces of wood at right angles to each other, supported by four legs, with narrow strips of hide interlaced and stretched tightly across, making a sort of lattice-work of leather, which is quite hard and firm. On this we spread the invariable ox-hide, so useful in many emergencies, and over that a clean piece of matting, which (when the "angréb" is our dinner-table) forms our table-cloth.

Often, however, late at night or very early in the morning, there is no time for either box or angréb, packing and unpacking interfering with these luxuries; but our dishes are placed on a mat on the ground, and we squat before them crosslegged, or any way that comes most conveniently, and habit puts one up to many a *wrinkle* one would not otherwise find out! We were off at 8.30 in the morning from Shankrat, and marched till 2 P.M. without stopping. The country was very stony; *millions* of loose stones lay scattered all over the ground, and I marvelled where they all came from. These stony tracts alternated with sandy plains, and two ranges of very rugged hills ran along on either side at the distance of about a quarter of a mile from our track.

We had been going along over this dull

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uninteresting plain for some hours, and I own to having felt very weary of it that morning, when the monotony was suddenly broken by an exclamation from one of the men that wild asses were in the distance. It was hardly possible for us to discern them at first; these keen-sighted Arabs, with eyes like hawks, accustomed to note every speck on the horizon in either earth or sky, had descried them long before we did; and when at last I saw them, it was only to make out two gray objects, almost as far away as I could observe anything. By the aid of good glasses I then saw that they were grazing, leaving off occasionally and looking up, turning their heads now and then slightly in our direction; possibly they had been as keen as the Arabs, and had become aware of danger not very remote. It went to my heart to think of these free, wild creatures being molested in their own domain, but the temptation was too great, the known difficulty of ever getting a wild ass adding zest to the sport! Very cautiously, however, they had to be approached, for, should they once become alarmed and on the move, their swift long stride would place them wholly beyond reach. We all halted; Charlie dismounted from his

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camel, and, followed by one man only, carrying an extra rifle, made a long detour to get if possible behind and at the same time to leeward of them. I also dismounted, and, sitting down upon the ground, watched with keen interest. I know not whether my sym-

STALKING WILD ASSES.

pathies were most with the sportsman or the game:—I was very anxious about the result. There was not a shrub or rock or anything between us and the asses, and stalking them was indeed difficult.

Long before a favourable spot or the right distance for a shot was reached, the fine creatures had become aware of something that

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warned them, and, raising their heads, they took another look behind them, and at once moved off from the place they had occupied. They did not go rapidly at first, but rather hesitatingly, as though they were themselves doubtful whether it was not a false alarm; soon, however, they began to trot, but instantly a shot with too unerring an aim for even a wild ass to escape, though at an immense distance, laid the bigger of the two low. Pity and triumph mingled in my heart; but in another moment the creature was up, and moving as though she had not even heard the sound of the bullet! a second shot again prostrated her, but a second time she recovered, and with a gigantic spring, bounding off, was completely lost to sight in a moment. The men ran almost as swiftly as she did, hoping to come up with her, and bring her in a trophy; but the life in a wild ass proved itself that day to be too much for either a long shot or the pace of an Arab, and though there were sad traces of the wounds on the ground for miles, she was not overtaken, and we never knew the termination of that race for life.

We went on a little farther to get the shade of a big rock, which rose up by itself, and quite detached from any chain or ridge, as rocks in

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the desert do sometimes, and sat down under it, near some scraggy mimosas, to eat our lunch. You cannot imagine how, in some of the long marches, I used to look forward to these little halts. I used to look at my watch so often when Charlie had made a detour, and gone off right or left for game, and I found it so dreadfully disappointing to discover that only five or ten minutes perhaps had passed since the last look, that I often made bargains with myself not to look again until such and such a landmark or time-mark had been passed, let the effort cost me what it might; and generally I kept the resolution, though, I am bound to say, sometimes I broke it! The next night was passed in a stranger way than any as yet; but I ought to tell you first that the nights are now becoming very cold, and, as the heat is increasing considerably by day, the contrast is very great.

A sharp east wind has been blowing for the last two days; and in the early mornings, and in the evenings too, we are shivering. I have had to get out some thick flannels that I brought, almost laughing at myself for doing so, and sleep in them! During the day I cannot, of course, attempt to wear thick things; so before we start, while the tents are being struck

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and the camels loaded, I go about, or sit scribbling to you, wrapped up in a couple of huge plaid shawls, and am thankful I have got them.

This east wind is extremely trying on the march. Blowing over the hot, parched land, it becomes like a blast from a furnace, and scorches one terribly. My face is dreadfully burnt and my lips are fearfully sore; and though I scarcely like to confess it, I have not been able to touch my face with water for the last two days, for it is almost *raw*, the skin having nearly all peeled off. I carefully take off the sand and dust with an old soft silk handkerchief and rub in pure neat's-foot oil, which is the most healing thing possible; besides, it is always conveniently at hand, as Charlie uses it for his rifles!

This scorching has happened in spite of my wearing a large pith hat, made specially for India, with a very broad brim, and a thick gauze veil doubled over it and tied carefully down, with the hope of excluding every particle of wind or dust, yet they manage to work in somehow. I also wear a large silk handkerchief tied round my throat to meet the veil, but in spite of this I am as brown as a berry wherever there is skin left to be brown! Charlie assures

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me this soreness will pass away, and that I shall become acclimatised; and so I hope I shall. There is profound consolation in the fact that there is nobody to see me, and I trust that before I reach Kassala, where I hear there are a few Europeans, I shall present a more respectable appearance. I am glad that I even cannot well see myself; my only looking-glass, or the only one I find it possible to have at hand, is the back of a small pocket pincushion, about an inch and a half in diameter, and what I am able to see in that inclines me to defer a more extensive view to a later period.

At about 5.30 on the evening of the 23d we halted about half-way to the next mohatta, intending to rest, at a very good camping-ground we came to, until midnight, when the moon would have risen and we should be able to reach the station,—travelling by such light as she would give us,—before the sun rose and the heat of the day set in.

Accordingly, the order was issued to "unload," and the camp was prepared as usual. We were in a sheltered spot and the wind had fallen; and as our halt was to be only for a few hours, I would not have a tent pitched, but after supper lay down in my travelling dress on

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rugs that were spread on a gently sloping ground by some bushes, and fell off to sleep. About half-past twelve, when all was hushed in profound tranquillity, and it was discovered afterwards that even the watchers had slumbered at their posts, I awoke with a sensation that it was about time to be on the move again, and found that it was indeed nearly one o'clock. No time was to be lost in rousing the men; Charlie bestirred himself at once, and called out lustily to the head man to wake the rest; no one at first responded, and at length, when by repeated shouting the man who was supposed to be doing sentry became aware of what was going on, he came silently across the ground in our direction and commenced a remonstrance. His tone was sullen and dogged, his words impertinent, and his appearance wholly obstinate.

Never shall I forget the scene that followed. Before I had a notion of what was about to happen Charlie had cleared the intervening space with one bound, and "by the dusky moonbeam's misty light" I beheld two figures swaying to and fro, not exactly in close embrace, but in far closer proximity to each other than one of them found to be agreeable; and when my husband returned to his rug he was so

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exhausted that I felt some apprehension as to the condition daylight would reveal of the other!

Charlie afterwards told me that he had found it so impossible to get hold of the man, either by his very scanty garments or by his well-greased skin, that there was nothing for it but to seize him by his woolly shock, and as he was reluctant to hit him, to drag him backwards and forwards until he had promised to do as he was ordered.

The effect of this early morning exercise was marvellous on the whole camp! Every swarthy form was awake in an instant; the ground immediately resembled a hive of bees, and our coffee was brought to us, and the hajeen and "Prince" were saddled and waiting before we were even ready for them! We mounted and rode off, feeling sure that the baggage camels would follow shortly; but how we fared on our journey, and whether they did follow quickly or not, I will tell you in my next.

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LETTER VI.

Gentleness towards camel drivers thrown away—The natives not greedy—The new guide had deceived us—The kettle is lost—We lose our way in the dark—Hopeless search for the telegraph poles—Capabilities of the Soudanese—The patois of the natives—We smell wood smoke—A well-greased skin—The welcome "Diwan"—Sleep at last.

LAGUA (*still*), 24*th February* 1878.

WE are having such a delicious long rest to-day that I can resume my writing this afternoon, and finish the account of our march from that camping-ground which will ever be associated in my mind with the memorable struggle that took place upon it. I fear I am becoming dreadfully hardened as to the treatment of these natives, and sometimes quite shudder at myself. I entered the country with such different feelings, and thought that gentleness would do everything; but I find, alas! that with the camel drivers, at least, anything of that sort, when their own wishes are opposed, is entirely thrown away. I have not, as yet, had much experience

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of the people generally; those that we have come across, in the few villages we have passed through, have been very obliging in bringing us milk or eggs; but then, as they have probably looked upon us merely in the light of a good market, and have been glad to dispose of these articles, there has not been much opportunity of judging what they might be under other circumstances.

The women scarcely ever come near us; this is, I suppose, on account of Charlie's presence! the Mohammedan law forbidding a wife to be looked upon by any men except those of her own family, and in the case of "an infidel" this restriction would be doubly binding.

The men bring us the goods, and now and then a very old and particularly ugly grandam, who deems, doubtless, that she is "a law unto herself," and exempt from all rules that might have been binding in her youth, will creep into the corner of the rest-house, or squat down in the neighbourhood of the tents, and have a good stare at us. We have not found them at all greedy or grasping, poor things; on the contrary, they ask but very little for what they bring, and are always quite satisfied to get it, and extremely pleased if they receive a few

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cents over the price or a small present when we leave.

It is only of the camel drivers I speak when I say that my patience is tried. Doubtless their hard, rough life—continually on the tramp in all seasons, exposed to every sort of hardship, and having to deal with merchants, either of their own nation, or Italians and Greeks, who often endeavour to grind them down, and get all the work they can out of them for as little pay as possible—has increased their disposition to rapacity, and caused them to regard all who may employ them as natural enemies and fair game for opposition.

They really are, for the most part, intensely aggravating, being perfectly indifferent to one's wishes or convenience, lazy, sulky, obstinate, and now and then insolent, both in manner and words. The discomfort that we suffered from, owing to their disinclination to start from the last camping-ground at midnight, I will now tell you of.

We had found, at a former station, a man who professed to know the whole country through which we wished to travel, right down to Kassala, as well as he knew the twists and turns of his own village; and as we were in

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want of another guide—wishing, when it was feasible, to separate from the camels—we gladly accepted the services of this so-called "guide."

We found out afterwards, to our dismay, that he scarcely knew the country going south at all, but had wished to take advantage of our protection to go himself to Kassala. At the start I am speaking of, however, we took him as our own especial escort, intending the guide who had been with us from the beginning to follow with the baggage after we had set off. We were accompanied as usual by our little select circle—all of whom, I am sure, you now know too well by name or description for me to enumerate again—and three or four of the other men, who always came to lead the dogs or carry the guns.

We had not, in the dim light, observed that when we started the former guide had adroitly slipped himself in among the party, and must, therefore, evidently have been in collusion with the new man, who was doubtless one of his friends or relations. The moon, which was on the wane, had been high overhead several hours before, while we were all slumbering peacefully under the bushes, but would very shortly set; we went on, however, in perfect

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confidence that as the "mohatta" was not many miles off we should reach it before this happened.

After we had gone a good way Charlie's saddle became loose—doubtless in the excitement which had preceded our departure it had been fastened too hastily—and to tighten it properly he had to dismount, and the various things which had been attached to it had to be taken off. These were laid upon the ground, and in the semi-darkness the kettle—that dear friend, that gave me many a happy moment in the midst of weary afternoons!—was overlooked and left behind.

We went on, unconscious of our loss till it was almost quite dark, and then it was suddenly discovered. Ahmed, who was always ready to do an obliging turn, at once volunteered to go back and institute a search, and almost before we knew he was gone, he was off. On we went, and on went the moon, nearer and nearer to the horizon; finally she went below it and darkness fell upon the land. Clouds had come up, and there was not even a star to be seen.

We halted on account of Ahmed, not liking to leave him alone in a country he was wholly

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unacquainted with,—in which there might, or might not, be wild beasts,—and in the dark; we waited half an hour, and shouted and cooey'd, but got no response! Then a man, whose presence we had not been aware of before, stepped to the front and offered to go back for him. To our amazement the guide, who had received the "treatment" of a few hours ago, stood before us. He was asked why he had come, or rather why he had not remained in charge of the camels as he had been told to do. We were very soon to discover the reason for ourselves. Disregarding the question, he began assuring us at once that it would be very difficult, if not impossible, for Ahmed to find his way back by himself; that he might, and probably would, lose his path, and that *he* ought to return to seek him. As we felt much apprehension on this score ourselves, he was sent back, and we went on in all confidence under the guidance of our new ally, but we soon realised that, unknown to us, the man who had returned (the original guide) had, in truth, been the leader. For a short time we continued on the right track, but soon the ground began to be uncommonly rough; we came across heaps of mimosa bushes, with cruel, sharp, thorny

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branches sticking out in every direction, brushing across one's face unawares and inflicting more than one ugly scratch, so that we had literally to go at a snail's pace to avoid them, and to grope for a path, so to speak, over the desert.

The donkeys stumbled, at last even "Prince" fell, and then I got off (I am quite expert by this time at mounting and dismounting without any assistance), and gave him over to "Biri Biri," preferring to walk, as I could avoid the bushes and stones best on foot. The fact at last became quite evident that we were out of the right path; we had each, I feel sure, for some time past endeavoured to smother this unpleasant conviction in the depths of our inmost convictions, but it could no longer lie dormant; calling upon the guide to give an account of himself and his route, a halt was ordered. The old man, who had gone on some distance ahead, partly to search for the track he had lost—because he had never known it!—and partly, doubtless, to escape the wrath that might descend upon him when his deception was discovered, came reluctantly back, and standing at a safe distance, where he could not even be seen, muttered something in the miserable

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patois which the common people speak among themselves. He did not remember that, when wishing to pass himself off as a guide, he had spoken intelligible Arabic, and he now feigned ignorance of it, appearing to explain that he was perfectly aware of the road and would conduct us in safety to the village.

Utterly reluctant again to trust him, we cast about for ourselves, and, remaining stationary, sent out Hussein and another man right and left, but within earshot, to look for the telegraph poles, which we now remembered we had not come across for nearly an hour. Our scouts searched and shouted, and answering shouts were sent back to reassure them and keep up their courage; but no poles were to be found, and there was nothing to do after a time but call them back again, and, keeping all together, go on, hoping that at last, or at any rate by the time daylight came, we should find ourselves again upon the right path. It must be remembered that, with the exception of the camel men and the one guide we had had from the beginning, none of the servants had ever been over that part of the country before, or if so, it had been only very partially, and at long intervals; none of the party except those I have

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named were familiar with it. Ahmed had come straight up the Red Sea many years before from Massowa to Suez, where he had since been in service. "Biri Biri" had scarcely ever been, and certainly had never "been heard of twenty miles from home," and the others were youths whom we had picked up in villages not very far distant from the first mohatta on the road.

All had been eager to come with us, and many more would have joined us had we taken them. The offer of service and the chance of earning wages, however small, we find are never rejected by the Soudanese. There is evidently a spirit of adventure and enterprise in them that betokens a race quite open to the advantages of travel, and they manifest an intelligence and keenness which betoken capabilities that might, under a good Government, enable them to develop into a fine race, appreciative of a civilisation higher than their own.

But I must return to our march. The most ludicrous thing was, if there could be said to be any ludicrous side to the picture, that the so-called guide began to show unmistakable signs of becoming frightened. Braving abuse, he returned close to us, spoke in the most agitated

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tone, begged us to stop altogether until daylight appeared, proposed lighting a fire, and tremblingly inquired if the "Khawajah" (master) had his rifle at hand and loaded. What he feared was best known to himself; what he had reason personally to fear he never even afterwards experienced!

He may perhaps have caught sounds of other travellers, as was sometimes the case, and not known whether they were robbers or peaceful caravans; or he may have heard hyenas, or a lion, though we did not think that the latter were in that part of the country; he did not allege anything intelligible, and got into such a hopeless mixture of Arabic and his own patois that we now believed that his fright at finding himself wrong had on the first occasion caused him to forget Arabic, which may have been to him chiefly an acquired tongue. This patois is called "Bijjia," and is, to judge by the sound of it, one of the lowest forms of language that I ever heard. Even the "Tamal" of the Kling races of India sounds more enlightened and more like a language, though *that* has always appeared to me to be the nearest approach to the whirring and creaking of a sawmill that the human voice could

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emit. "Bijjia" is like the grunting of animals, and it has reminded me, on more than one occasion, of the sounds that proceed from a sty full of hungry little pigs!

There was no real danger of either robbers or wild beasts on the present occasion that we became aware of, though I must own that (perhaps catching too readily the guide's tone) visions of being "lost in the desert" rose up with but little relish before my mind. Great discomfort there actually was; it was bitterly cold and generally miserable, and as yet we did not see our way out of it.

We again halted, and while we were reconsidering what was to be done, a faint streak of something that could hardly be called light, and yet that made a break in the utter gloom, appeared almost quite suddenly on the horizon, and gradually a cold grayish hue spread itself abroad in the distant sky, and we became aware of the welcome fact that day was dawning. Almost simultaneously Hussein, who was particularly quick-witted, declared that he heard a cock crow; we strained our ears eagerly in the direction he intimated, and oh!—unspeakable joy—the next instant we distinctly heard the distant barking of a dog. In that still atmos-

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phere, with not a breath of air stirring, the sound travelled a great distance, and faintly as it came to us it was unmistakable. We turned, you may be sure, without the loss of another moment, in the direction of these welcome signs of life, and before long discovered, although we had been wandering about in the dark so long, that we had only gone about half a mile out of our way, but that we had turned back again in the direction of the last camping-ground. I cannot tell you how grateful to my senses was the smell of wood smoke that after a few minutes came floating to us from afar off. It spoke of coming warmth and rest and comfort, and of something, too, that should be hot and refreshing! of which, indeed, we were in much need. I fear you will think me very sublunary, but at times like these the thought of "creature comforts" rises up and takes a prominent place above all others!—And can you blame me for this confession, or rather for the fact?

It was the village and police-station of "Lagua" we had arrived at, and right glad was I to enter it. I remounted "Prince" directly we knew where we were going to, both to save myself further fatigue and also to make a more dignified entrance into the village.

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Immediately the good people became aware that travellers were coming every one turned out to welcome or to stare at us. They might have been in their beds but a few moments before, but the toilet of an Ethiopian Arab is very easily performed. For the most part, they sleep in the only one garment (which often represents an apparently seamless sheet) that they possess. This is worn by day and by night, and occasionally (*very* occasionally) washed at any stream there may happen to be in the neighbourhood, and when dry again resumed. In the hot weather, to which we are now fast hastening, when all the streams are dry and water is very scarce, one does not venture to think of how long a period may elapse without even this primitive method being adopted. Personal ablutions are, I believe, almost wholly unknown to this people, and, indeed, they are not desired by them! Instead of water they prefer oil or rather fat, with which, as a protection from the sun, they anoint themselves, rubbing it in freely whenever they get the chance, and the most esteemed gift one can make them is the fat, or such part of it as can be spared, whenever a sheep is killed.

It is a fact that a well-greased skin will not

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burn or peel off as an ungreased well-washed skin will do: the Arabs by experience know this, and use the fat as a preventative rather than a cure. Even Aaron of old was probably well aware of the fact when he rejoiced in the oil which "ran down from his beard, even to the skirts of his garments."

All the police, who appeared to be chiefly negroes, and are probably kidnapped slaves from Central Africa, were the first to appear as we neared the "zareeba." They came out quickly, and gave us hearty, cordial greetings, and after our many hours of desolate discomfort it was indeed pleasant to see their good-natured grinning faces. We returned their kind expressions with unfeigned warmth, and felt more than usually inclined to be on friendly terms.

We were conducted straight through the village—a very small one, really not more than a collection of twenty huts or so—to the "rest-house" for travellers. These rest-houses go by the name of "Diwan," and are provided at almost every station and in every town throughout the Soudan; they are, we are told, mainly for the convenience of caravans taking merchandise up and down the country. In this case the diwan was a large straw hut, perfectly bare,

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and with only a mud floor, but *any* shelter was welcome. The men at once lighted a fire in the centre, which at first caused me some trepidation as to the sparks, but it appeared to be the usual custom, and nothing wrong happened: there was already a great black circle on the ground showing that the same thing had been done before.

They brought us eggs and milk, and we at once prepared the reviving "*cock-tails*" to which I had been looking forward, for we never fail to carry something appropriate for such an emergency.

We cowered over the fire in company with all the negroes, who came in, *sans cérémonie*, and also sat down round it, watching our every movement with the greatest interest. They were eager for news, and Charlie good-naturedly told them everything they wanted to know, and talked with them on all sorts of subjects. They had heard of the war between Russia and Turkey, and were extremely anxious to know all about it, as they doubtless think that everything affecting Turkey bears indirectly upon Egypt, and consequently upon the Soudan and upon themselves.

An indiscriminate multitude of swarthy

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fellows, besides the police, who had considered themselves privileged to draw near, darkened the doorway, so that at least half if not the whole of the male population of the village was in the hut.

We sat or squatted in the midst of this strange company on the ox-hide and "farrwah" (a thick soft mat made of sheep-skin, the wool of which is either dyed dark blue, or bleached perfectly white) that had been brought in from the camel saddle and spread upon the ground; but after a few minutes, doubtless when some unselfish kindly form had vacated it, an "angréb," for my especial benefit, made its appearance. I gladly availed myself of it, and within a very short time became, for the next two hours, wholly unconscious of the curious scene that was going on around. In a snug corner, not however very far from the fire, but with the protecting sense of Charlie's back between myself and the crowd, I yielded to the combined effect of previous fatigue and present comfort, and became happily oblivious of everything. The never-ceasing queries of the Arabs, the patient replies, the gibberish-sounding "Bijjia" spoken among themselves, even the interested glances in my direction, and the

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occasional blazing-up of the fire as fresh wood was thrown upon it, all faded gradually from my mind, and I slept the refreshing sleep which the past night's exertions made so acceptable.

About half-past seven I awoke to find the men gone, Charlie himself asleep on the ox-hide by the dying embers of the fire, and general tranquillity prevailing. This state of things, however, was far too good to last; but the manner in which it was interrupted I must keep for another time.

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LETTER VII.

Account of Lagua completed—The rough path to the gorge—Filling the water skins—The eagle overhead—The fatted sheep—A native delicacy—Ahmed is found—Warning to the camel drivers—Yes and no, by sounds—Amazement at my boots—Sympathy with my torn dress—Terror at my being able to write—Good-bye to Lagua.

WANDIK, 25*th February*.

WE have come to such a lovely camping-ground to-day that I want to begin raving about it at once, without going back to where I left off; but I see, on looking at my letter, that I promised to complete the account of our day at Lagua, and so I will. I was hoping, when I found Charlie asleep in the "diwan," that he would not be disturbed for a while, as I knew he must be very tired, when one of the servants unexpectedly came in to ask if he should take the donkeys and the "hajeen" away to get water, and he was roused. We found that the only stream was about three miles off, in a gorge, between two little ranges of hills that rose up at that distance. It was at

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once decided that they should go, and Charlie said he would go too, hoping to find a pool big enough for a bath, and they all set off. I, feeling only half rested, said I would remain in the hut, and perhaps get another snooze. This, however, I soon found to be impossible, and being anxious to see all I could of every place we came to (also perhaps allured by the possible hope of a bath myself!), I determined to follow, and reach the gorge as well. I left the hut, and as the country was perfectly flat, with no trees or shrubs in the direction of the hills, I saw at once the road the party had taken. It was over ground as rough as a ploughed field, and the wind, which always seems to rise as soon as the sun gets up, was blowing half a gale. I ran as hard as I could, hoping to overtake them before they got quite beyond reach, but it was frightfully fatiguing, and soon I had to walk. Shouting would have been of no use whatever, as my voice would have been merely swept back to the village.

I walked and ran by turns, making desperate "spurts" sometimes; and at last, just as I was getting quite "done up," by good luck Hussein turned his head and saw me. My faithful ally at once stopped, and pointed me out to Charlie,

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and immediately the little caravan halted. Hussein at once brought back my donkey, and though without a saddle, I was only too glad to make the rest of the way on the back of my *princely* steed, and in due course we reached the gorge. It was a beautiful wild place, in spite of the cliffs being black and bare. They were very high, and large boulders were lying about in every direction on the ground.

The water was, however, alas! quite low, and even in the pools there was some difficulty in filling the skins, so the longed-for bath was out of the question; nevertheless, during the rains the whole country, which is perfectly flat for miles round, is completely flooded. The water sweeps down from the hills in torrents, and washes all before it, and very frequently, if not always, the villagers vacate the lowlands, which they return to and cultivate after the rains, and erect their huts for the time being on higher ground, wherever they can find it.

I sat down under the shelter of a big rock, on some loose sand there was in the ravine, and looked about. It was a pretty scene; and so peaceful and quiet that, after the various vicissitudes of the preceding hours, I enjoyed it thoroughly.

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The gurgling and rippling of the stream, as it trickled over the stones, the subdued distant murmur of the men's voices as they talked to each other and to the animals, and the faint rustle of some tall reeds not far off, all combined to bring an air of repose that was delicious. Charlie had wandered off with his gun to look for anything that might present itself in the shape of game, and in the tranquillity of the general situation I nearly went to sleep again. You'll begin to think that *that* is becoming my normal condition; and I must own that whenever I get the chance a good sleep and a good meal rank as matters of very grave importance in the day's work!

About the time the skins were filled, Charlie returned and brought a beautiful little rock partridge with him, which he had shot a few hundred yards farther up, and he said we must "be moving."

I felt quite sorry to think of leaving my snug, peaceful nook, but it was already becoming hot, and would, I knew, take us some time to get back to the village. The effort had to be made; I was up, and we started. Slowly picking our steps down the ravine, among and over the big boulders, we came upon a cleft

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of the rock which we had hardly noticed in ascending, and there—swooping overhead, circling round and round, quite slowly, sometimes coming down almost to the top of the cliff, and then wheeling off again to a higher point—was an enormous black eagle: the first eagle I have ever seen in its own wild, free, unfettered life. I could not but admire the splendid creature; and yet the sporting instinct, which I fear is coming out with alarming strength, seized me in a moment, and I glanced at Charlie. His rifle was already at his shoulder, but before I could look up again the bird had vanished! Its swift keen eye had taken in the situation in a moment, and it was off. One gigantic swoop had carried it below the point of the projecting cliff, and for a moment we could not even see it. The next it reappeared almost as a speck in the far distance, and safe beyond the reach of the dreaded weapon.

I was glad that if we were not to have it at all it had got away without being wounded; but it would have been a grand prize, and we were both rather inconsolable for a little time! When we got back to the mohatta we found two things which still further disconcerted us. Ahmed had not been found; the guide who

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had gone to look for him had actually given him up, and returned from the search alone; and the baggage camels, whom we had expected to bring our breakfast, were not even in sight. Rival sensations of famishing hunger and anxiety about Ahmed struggled for the mastery, but we determined to endeavour to appease both.

The old guide who had lost his way in the dark now came valiantly to the front, and promising by every sacred utterance in the "Koran" not to come back unless he brought the lad with him, volunteered to go and look for him. We did not allow him to go alone, but sent two others also; and the trio set forth, instigated to untold exertions by the promise I held out of gifts which should crown their success.

Then we began to think about breakfast. There was nothing to be done but to buy, kill, and eat, then and there, the fatted sheep of the village, and this we did. I trust it was nobody's *pet lamb!* though I must own that, from the tenderness and relish, which to us were so acceptable, that particular "mutton" must have had a good time of it previously. Let us hope that the good time we had after-

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wards may, under some possible transmigration-of-soul theory (on an inverse principle to that usually accepted), have reconciled it to its timely escape from this vale of tears.

How do you think we managed our meal? for you know we had neither cooking pots, frying pans, nor knives and forks; they were all behind on the camels, and the friendly villagers, with all their goodwill, could not assist us to *those* little comforts. This was what we did:—Charlie cut off most delicate strips of meat (far away from the rest-house, you understand, at the spot where all the preliminary preparations had gone on), and brought them in, and cooked them over the ashes of the fire in the hut, on an impromptu gridiron made of broken bits of telegraph wire; and when they were cooked, we ate them out of a brass wash-hand basin, cutting off small pieces from the long strips with our pocket knives,—and I assure you I never tasted anything more delicious than that meat was. It was so tender that mastication was scarcely needed, and as sweet or sweeter than any Welsh or Scotch mutton could have been,—with Huntley and Palmer's "water biscuits," and the usual "*reviver*" (which I quite blush to allude to again!)

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we fared sumptuously, and should not have been badly off if such had been our breakfast every day.

One little incident occurred which I scarcely know how to tell you of, I fear it will horrify you so terribly: keen as my appetite was, it certainly would have prevented me from taking a mouthful had it happened sooner, but it fortunately took place just as we were finishing. I was on the point of going out to see if I could descry anything of the lost Ahmed when Sher Ullah rushed almost fainting into the hut, and, with a face livid with disgust, exclaimed in Malay, "Sir! they are eating the eyes! and," he added, "*raw*, and almost warm."

Such was the fact; Charlie found the negro policemen, to whom had been given such parts of the sheep as we did not require, in the fullest enjoyment of what was evidently to them one of their greatest luxuries; and, from the zest with which the delicacy was appreciated, it was clear that it was not the first time they had made its acquaintance.

The disdain in which the Malay has often hitherto held the Arabs has at this juncture culminated into insurmountable contempt: the manner in which, in spite of his good-nature,

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he is sometimes apt to hold himself aloof, has been frequently amusing;—but I now fear that his feeling of superiority may augur inconvenience for the future; for as he is and must be inevitably mixed up with them, in waiting upon us, it will be awkward if, to a certain extent, he cannot work with them; however, he is a good boy, and I will not anticipate difficulties which may never arise. In this instance I think he has certainly just cause for a feeling of aversion.

This little excitement had hardly subsided when, I am glad to tell you, a much more pleasing occurrence took place, in the return of Ahmed. He had got far away in the darkness, quite out of the right track; had wandered on and on, north again instead of south; and having become completely exhausted, had lain down and gone fast asleep. The men had found some difficulty in rousing him, but after giving him food and water, which they had taken with them, he revived, and walked back.

The good fellow had got my kettle, but lost his way after finding it. I was inexpressibly thankful to see him, and we then determined never again to allow one man to wander by himself in the "wilds" on any pretext whatever—

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not even for the sake of an afternoon tea-kettle!

A shudder crept over me as I imagined what might have been his fate had the men not happened to stumble on his track, or had he gone too far in another direction from the one they had taken. Night would have come on; and, perhaps, too faint to rouse himself, he might have become a prey to any horrors of the desert: it was a subject I did not like to think about.

A good meal and a long rest were specially prescribed for him, and by the evening he was quite himself again.

Our next thoughts were about the baggage camels; at twelve o'clock they slowly wended their way into the village.

After we had left the camping ground the incorrigible drivers had lain down and gone to sleep again! On awaking they had leisurely cooked their breakfasts, and about eight o'clock, the hour we expected them to appear at Lagua, they had started on the march. This was told us by the traveller, who declared, with what veracity it is impossible to know, that he had done his utmost to make them follow when we left, but without avail.

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Finding that previous attempts at coercion had failed, and being wholly unwilling to resort to like measures again, Charlie then called all the camel drivers round him, and told them that for the future, during the march, he would not chastise them, but that if they continued to disregard his orders, he should, on our arrival at Kassala, report them to the Pasha, and have them punished by his authority. Whether this threat will have a satisfactory effect or not, remains to be proved—probably they do not in the least believe it; but I, for my part, incline to think that unless they alter their conduct they'll discover the truth of it in time to come.

I must not forget to tell you of a curious custom among some of these people that I became aware of at Lagua. It was when we were sitting over the wood-fire in the rest-house after the night march, and the men were all crowding round, eager to talk and be talked to. Sometimes—not always, but as often as not—in replying to questions which Charlie put to them, they answered with sounds, instead of words. If they wished to give an affirmative, they would emit a sort of "click," the kind of noise that tells a horse to go on. Should the subject be deemed of no great

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importance, this would be done simply, and only once; but if they became excited, or wished to make their assurance emphatic, a very shower of "clicks" would fall in loud and rapid succession, reminding one, as I said just now, of the manner of speaking to a horse; or, as it became sometimes rather guttural, of something between that and calling to chickens, not exactly either "click, click, click" or "cluck, cluck, cluck," but a happy mixture, which I am sure only an Arab throat could produce.

A negative was expressed by the sort of noise sometimes made when vexation or annoyance is indicated, yet neither of these feelings were entertained in the slightest degree by the men on the occasion I am referring to; it was their natural or very frequent manner of saying "no." I am sure I don't know how to spell the sound. The tongue is placed against the upper part of the mouth, just behind the front teeth, and swiftly withdrawn, when, if it can be spelt at all, a sort of "*tch*" is produced.

I seldom heard this repeated. It used to break forth as an emphatic solitary burst, one of which, accompanied by a slight shake of the head, seemed to be considered sufficient to carry conviction with it. I believe this manner

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of conveying affirmation and denial is known in other parts of the world, and, uncivilised as it appears at first, when one gets accustomed to it it strikes one, as many other savage things do, as being very expressive—and certainly seems less troublesome than words; but you must not think that I am advocating it for all that!

The interest the good fellows at Lagua,—I mean the negro police,—took in my *boots*, was most amusing! They have probably seen English *men* before, as several parties of sportsmen have passed through the country, and have doubtless stopped at the "mohattas." It was therefore not surprising that Charlie's very substantial high-lows caused them no astonishment, but they could not conceal their wonder at my "Balmorals." They were of course lacing boots, and very high, coming up considerably over my ankles; and as we were sitting round the fire, and I was poking out my feet to get them well roasted, I noticed curious glances being directed towards them, and heard expressions of perplexity and wonder. By and by, when I was not observing, I suddenly felt a soft, somewhat snake-like motion on my instep, but at once apprehending what it was, and unwilling to rebuff our

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primitive hosts, I neither withdrew my foot nor allowed the exclamation, into which I had been almost startled, to escape me.

After a moment I glanced down and saw one old fellow, who probably thought himself privileged by age, gently passing his hand over the front of my boot, and studying it with profound attention, while all the others looked on. It was evidently the greatest curiosity they had come across for a long time, and they were much exercised in their minds concerning it. I am not sure that they had not vague misgivings as to whether it was not part and parcel of my foot itself! but I soon enlightened them on that score. I showed them how it unfastened, and the intricacies of the lacing apparatus, at which point their surprise culminated, and the expressions of astonishment were numerous. During the last night's march while I was on "Prince," and constantly coming in contact with the thorny mimosas, my dress had got much torn, and having no sewing materials until the camels arrived, I had been obliged to pin up the rents as well as I could. These tears were a source of much concern to these kindly folk, and they shewed great regret at the accidents, being quite unwilling to make

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light of them as I did; and when we were about to start in the evening, after I had repaired the mischief, they regarded my handiwork with great satisfaction, and I feel convinced that had we remained long enough at Lagua, all the garments of the village would doubtless have been brought to me to repair!

Their greatest surprise, however, was when they saw me writing. The man who first happened to catch sight of me, as I was thus engaged, went out immediately and beckoned others in, and very soon a party of half a dozen or more were standing behind my shoulder watching the process. They had not previously believed that a *woman* could achieve that art, and probably entertained doubts as to the amount of mischief she might not be able to perpetrate if she could wield such a power. They asked Charlie with unmistakable anxiety if *all* women in his country could write; and when he replied that there were very few indeed who could not, they shook their heads, and felt, I am sure, that it was a land they were safer away from! However, as no palpable evils followed, and I was quite friendly with them to the last, they may have modified their opinion in my especial favour.

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My visit to Lagua had been so full of interest that I felt quite sorry to think of leaving it; but after another rest in preparation for the evening march, which I knew would be a fatiguing one, and a cup of tea, the time drew near for us to be off again, and our first really long halt was over.

Many of our kind though strange friends insisted upon accompanying us some distance on the road, and when at last they turned back I was really sorry to say good-bye to them.

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LETTER VIII.

How I write my letters—"A walking tour through the Soudan"—The dogs begin to get "done up"—"Flo" and the sulky Arab—The hyena hunt—Contrast between the dogs—Debûs was dearly bought—The glittering prize—Gorge infested by lions—We march in single file—An unpleasant apprehension—A Job's comforter.

BULĀK, *26th February.*

WE are halting again for a few hours this afternoon, and while Charlie has gone out to look for something in the way of game, so as to be able if possible to give the dogs a good supper, I will continue my scribbling for a bit. I keep my writing materials always at hand; a leather portfolio, which carries everything (even one of the "Push" ink-bottles, that shut up completely into a wooden frame, and are invaluable for travelling), goes with the kettle, and various other small articles on Charlie's camel, and is available whenever we halt or whenever I can get half an hour at any time, under the shade of a bush or rock, to continue my letters. I want now to tell you of our

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march from Lagua, and our first real alarm of lions on the road.

We left the village soon after five o'clock on the evening of the 24th, and went on till about half-past nine, when we halted. We would not travel during the night, as the moon rose so late that we should have been in the dark almost all the time, and the experiences of the night before had not been agreeable enough to make us desire a repetition.

The country for miles round was quite flat, but in the distance, to the west, were rugged hills of red sandstone. The plain over which our road lay was at first hard earth, not sandy; here and there were immense tracts covered with stones—stones of all shapes and sizes; travelling over and amongst them was difficult, troublesome work, both for the camels and myself, for I walked a good deal that evening. I have already walked surprising distances since we entered the country, and it sometimes occurs to me that I might be said to be making "a walking tour through the Soudan!" In the early mornings I often walk to get myself warm, and in the evenings, after the heat of the day, when it has become cool again, I walk for the mere pleasure of it, and for the sake of

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exercise. Charlie often walks with me, but he is not genuinely fond of it as I am, so I often start first, "leading the van," and far outstrip them all,—though you may be sure I always take care to keep within sight and hail!

Half the reason too of my walking so much is that "Prince" has such a horrible bridle; it is quite an insult to him and an annoyance to me to have such a broad, thick, clumsy thing; but somehow or other we omitted to order one to be sent with him from Cairo, and nothing better was to be got at Suez. It is just possible that we may be able to pick up a good one at Kassala, where I hear there are Italian and Greek merchants who have all kinds of wares; but I have misgivings about it, and if there is anything of the kind there it will be indeed strange to have found it in, so to speak, the midst of a desert.

At Kassala, however, as I think I have told you before, I am certain to be able to get a good riding camel, and I am looking forward to this with immense pleasure. From Lagua I walked for nearly two hours, and enjoyed it immensely. The wind had fallen; the air was soft and cool; we had had almost a whole day's rest, and, to use a favourite expression of

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some of those whom I often wished had come from England for the trip, I was as "fit" as possible. I wished I could have imparted some of my strength to the dogs, for they began to show unmistakable symptoms of being much exhausted. My heart ached for poor "Flo," the sweet, gentle thing, that had run over from her bed the first night we slept in the open to come and give me a little kiss, and reassure me, in her sweet, dumb, gentle way.

We found she was quite foot-sore, poor thing. She set off from the mohatta at Lagua with the others, to follow the camels as usual, but in one minute turned back and ran towards the village again, evidently in too much pain to attempt the journey. We immediately had her taken up and carried by one of the servants on the top of a camel. Unfortunately, neither man nor dog, at first at all approved of this plan. The man, a gun carrier and general helper, was a sulky, ill-looking fellow, always ready to shirk every duty appointed him; and he now scowled his darkest at the distasteful task before him, looking so reluctant to acquiesce that I had serious apprehensions that one of two results might ensue—either that, in spite

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of his resolution of the morning, Charlie would be tempted to try the effect of "persuasive measures" again; or that, purely by accident (as the Arab would allege), "Flo" would suddenly fall from her exalted position and become so injured that her sufferings would have to be ended then and there. This terror so possessed me that for a long time I kept close by that camel; and I kept also an eagle, and I trust discomforting, eye upon that sulky Hadendoa, who glared upon me in return in a manner that clearly indicated he was aware of misgivings in my mind, though the exact shape they took may have perplexed him. "Flo" herself was, to begin with, very uneasy in her equestrian attitude (if one may apply that term to camel-back); but after a time she settled down, wedged herself into a nook between some sacks, and appeared to go to sleep.

Then the Arab looked less sulky and I became more at ease,—gradually quickened my pace, got in front of the caravan, and led the way. We went on in this manner for some time, when a subdued halloa from behind warned me of something ahead, and I became aware of a dark object crouching under a bit of rock—so dark, and at a distance so much like the rock

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itself, that, unwarned, I should probably not have noticed it. Signs were made for me to move on one side, and apprehending the situation at once, I went off to the right. A bullet immediately whizzed by, and the dogs who were not being carried, Shot, Debûs, Elfie, Fairy, and Zaituna, flew past me like the wind. The dark object, a large hyena, stole stealthily, yet like lightning, from its lair, and with a long swinging stride, was soon making rapidly across the plain, his pursuers in full chase. It had been a long shot, and the unsteadiness of the camel, from the back of which Charlie had fired, had spoilt his aim, so the hyena was not hit. Fears were entertained that after a time, when the dogs would be getting exhausted, it might turn and perhaps kill one of them; so, as they had all disappeared over rocky ground, where the camel could not well go, Charlie dismounted, and calling some men to follow, set off as hard as he could to overtake and call them back.

We (the baggage camels, servants, and myself) lost sight of the whole party for about ten minutes, but went slowly on, knowing they would ultimately return to the road—which, by and by, they did; the hyena had escaped and

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had done no mischief, but, even when it had distanced them, there had been the greatest difficulty in calling the dogs off; they were then eager to go after some deer which they suddenly caught sight of, but it was too dark, and the deer were too far off, for a shot.

The difference in the condition of the dogs on their return was most noticeable. This was the first time that they had had a long chase since they had been with us, and I could not help observing it. Shot, the pointer, the English dog whom we had got at Suez, and who ought not to have lowered his dignity by going after a hyena, was quite exhausted and panting terribly; Elfie, Fairy, and Zaituna, young dogs, but bred and born in the country, were panting, but still eager, and still fresh and brisk. They came running round me, looking as though they wished to tell all the news, and as though they thought it very hard lines that they had not been allowed to get their "quarry;" and I had a long conversation with them about it all, which they entered thoroughly into! Old Debûs had scarcely turned a hair, but was almost as cool and fresh as he came trotting back, with his firm, powerful step, as he had been when he set out. His running that day

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augured well for the future, especially should the game have been wounded, for his great recommendation had been that he was good at pulling down "wounded deer."

By the bye I don't think I told you of an unlucky incident, connected with our purchase of Debûs, which caused me at the time, and does now, whenever I think of it, much vexation. I think I mentioned that we got him at our first camping ground the day after leaving Suakin. We were just about to start for our day's march, and all the boxes and baggage were lying about on the ground preparatory to lading the camels, when the men I have spoken of came out from a neighbouring village and brought Debûs with them. There were a dozen or more of them, and they were there a good time, doubtless taking note of everything belonging to us and of all our surroundings.

We did not try to hurry our purchase, as we knew it would (Eastern fashion) take time to bring them round to reasonable terms, and meantime they had to be conversed with and humoured! We struck a fair bargain in the end as to the dog, but the men, as I will tell you, made a much better one for themselves! and we rued our politeness, and even our pur-

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chase, for many a long day, for we felt that Debûs had been too dearly bought. While they were standing by I wanted to get something out of one of the boxes and asked Charlie for the key, which he had fastened, with a number of others, to a thick gold chain that had been made by a Chinese goldsmith only a few months before in the Malay Peninsula. This chain, which had been made after a special design, was a particularly good one, about eight inches long and half an inch thick, and it was pure gold, or at any rate had only sufficient alloy in it to enable the goldsmith to make it. (Perfectly pure gold is too soft to work well into shape by itself, and as it is very soft it is apt to break easily and is not very durable.) Charlie gave me the chain, and with the key I wanted I opened the box, took out what was required, and was about to return the chain to him, when he told me, as he was busy about something else, to hang it for a moment on a pole, with curved brass hooks on it, which had been made for hanging things upon inside the tents, and which was then stuck into the ground near him. At the moment I am speaking of the tents had been struck, and like all the rest of the things the pole was, for the time being, *anywhere*. Then

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came the final agreement about Debûs, then the payment, and the men were gone. Gone, too, as we afterwards discovered, was the gold chain, and not the least inconvenient part of it was, that all the keys were gone with it! We did not find this out till, at the next camping-ground, we wanted to unlock the padlock of the lunch basket to get out knives and forks, etc., and the chain and keys were then remembered. Sher Ullah bore testimony to having himself taken up the pole, and to there having been then nothing on it. None of the servants had been near at the time; and as we were buying Debûs, but little doubt existed in our minds as to who had been the thieves.

By the earliest streak of dawn Sher Ullah, Ahmed, and one of the camel drivers, went back to the ground to have a search, and returned just before we were ready to start, having been all over the spot, but having seen nothing of it. The glittering prize had, doubtless, been too great a temptation; and probably in an unguarded moment on our parts, which was swiftly taken advantage of by the bystanders, a stealthy hand had glided over the hook on which it had hung, and been withdrawn the richer for its being there.

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But I must return to our march from Lagua. About an hour after the hyena episode, when it was becoming quite dark, we got out of the flat country and came upon a tract of loose sand. Shortly after we passed through a deep gully, between high red sandstone cliffs on either side. There was quite a little jungle growing all the way up the face of these cliffs, which were very broken, and formed rugged terraces and cavernous places. Huge masses of stone and great boulders lay all about, making deep recesses; and as the bushes were big and thick, the whole gorge appeared then, whatever it may look by daylight, dismal and gloomy enough. By way of making it more cheerful, the camel drivers said that, although it was a halting-place in the daytime, on account of the shade, it would be extremely dangerous to stop there during the night, as it was well known to be infested with hyenas and lions,—especially the latter,—and that the only thing now to be done was to get through it as fast as possible. The gorge was more than half a mile long, and as the greatest pace of the baggage camels is only about two and a half miles an hour, I did not look forward, on hearing this, to the next fifteen minutes or so with feelings of the keenest relish. There

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was naught but dim starlight to guide us through this place, and the men tried hard to hurry the camels along, shouting and singing all the time at the top of their voices to frighten away the wild beasts they feared. They told us that a short time before, not knowing there were so many lions, they had halted there for the night on their way back from Kassala; and that, in spite of having kept up a large watch-fire, and having drawn all the camels into a circle close to it, two of the latter had been carried away. While they drove off the lions on one side they ran round and pounced upon them on the other.

They told us that a lion always kills its prey by springing with one bound upon its back, and striking a terrific blow upon the nape of the neck, which stuns the animal and dislocates the spine, causing instant death. I was riding "Prince," and had drawn him back from his usual foremost position as we entered the gully, alongside or rather just in front of Charlie's camel. We were obliged to go in single file, as the path was narrow; and had we encamped we should have had to go up to one of the broken terraces I before alluded to, into the very lair of the enemy. I had a rather

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uneasy apprehension that, being so much lower than any of the rest of the party, I might fall an easier prey than they to a sudden onslaught from any foe that might be lurking at hand ready for a spring. In this comparison of danger I allude to Charlie, the traveller—who rode his own camel—Ahmed, little "Biri Biri," and one or two others who had mounted one of the camels that happened to be lighter laden than the others. The rest of the servants were on foot, and the camel drivers also were walking, as they always did, at the head of their camels. They and Sher Ullah, on his donkey, ran the same risk that I did. I was schooling myself into making the best of the situation, and feeling quite bold as we went on and nothing happened, when one of the men, who chanced to be walking just behind me, close to Charlie's camel, began to tell him how donkey's flesh was the food which lions were fonder of than any other! and how they would risk more danger, and make bolder ventures to obtain it, than they would to get anything else! I understood quite enough Arabic by this time to know what he was saying, and I did not feel quite so well or happy after that; but I reflected that, from the time of Job, like comforters to this

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heathen had existed, and, though I felt inclined to scream at him, I held my peace. Before Charlie could "shut him up" the mischief had been done!

About the thickest and darkest part of the ravine the men requested that a rifle might be fired off, saying that wild beasts are often deterred by the sound of a shot, and this was at once done,—any listening ears there might have been receiving the benefit of both barrels. This was of course accomplished without halting, and our pace was not checked. At last we emerged from that gully without, I am thankful to say, having received any alarm—even a false one (although I must frankly confess to having experienced somewhat of a state of *real* alarm the whole way); and I think everybody breathed more freely when we were through it. How we passed the rest of the night you shall hear another day.

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LETTER IX.

Encamped at Miteb—Cooking in spite of high gale—"Durra"—Coiffure of mutton fat—Curl papers of white grease—Tent tied closely down—Camel men hate early rising—Carrying cash in the Soudan—The treasure in sealed bags—Possible robbers and wild beasts—African heat—The flinty sand—The Khor, Karkoeb—Vegetable ivory—Dôm palms.

ARADEB, 28*th February*.

WE went on about three miles beyond the gorge I told you of in my last, and encamped at a place called "Miteb," about ten miles from Lagua. The wind fell towards morning, but it raged terribly during the night; sleeping without a tent would have been impossible, but it was very hard work to pitch even the small one. The soil was so sandy that it was futile to attempt to drive the tent pegs in; as soon as the least strain was brought to bear upon them out they came, and the centre pole toppled over to one side several times just as we thought we had got all secured. The expedient was at last hit upon of fastening the ropes to some of the

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heavy boxes, and in this manner the tent was put up. I was dreadfully tired and hungry by the time it was ready, but dolefully reflected that I should probably have to go to bed without getting anything for supper but biscuits and milk,—thinking that in the midst of the gale it would be impossible to have anything cooked, —when to my joy, just as I had made up my mind to be very stoical and care no more about it, who should appear at the tent door but Sher Ullah and Ahmed, one bringing the dear kettle full of delicious tea, and the other boiled eggs and the rock partridge beautifully roasted which Charlie had shot at Lagua. "Biri Biri" followed with plates and cups, etc. etc., and in one minute a mat was covered with good things, and no royal feast could possibly have seemed to me daintier or more acceptable. I quite *love* these kind fellows when they do such nice things as this! and I am sure they have a good-hearted pleasure in seeing my enjoyment, and in ministering to our comfort.

They had found a little corner under the lee of an old decayed stump, and by dint of putting up some boxes near it, had got shelter enough to make a fire; and while the others were struggling with the tent, and we were preoccu-

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pied, they had quietly prepared this pleasant surprise. My cordial thanks were theirs then, as on many other occasions of a like kind, and I exhorted them to go and get a good supper themselves, for I felt sure they needed it.

Then we commenced our repast, and by the time we had finished it was near midnight. I feel sometimes that in telling you all about what we eat and drink I am like the people in a play, who sit down on the stage and have breakfast or supper, or some other meal in public. It always seems to me they must be so reluctant to do it! and *I* feel more than half ashamed of telling you how glad I am to see my kettle and all the other nice things appearing; but I am bound to confess that, though I *do* feel this when writing about it, I make far better use of the platters before me than the stage folk do of theirs; and I fancy my appetite is more like those which the actors may have after the play is over than those which they appear to have while the piece is going on. Perhaps you will like to know what the servants and camel men eat. Their chief food is made from a grain called "durra," which is sown in August, when the rains are nearly over, and cut in February and March. This grain is

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extremely nutritious, containing eleven and a half per cent of gluten, while wheat contains only ten per cent. It is also extremely profitable; a good head will weigh two pounds, and contain between four and five thousand seeds, and when it is plentiful fifty pounds can be purchased for a dollar. It is extremely good food for animals as well as men; camels, horses, and mules are fed upon it. From this durra they make a kind of porridge, called "lugma," very much like the porridge made from Scotch oatmeal; and when milk is added, and it is either sweetened with sugar or eaten with salt, "according to taste" (as advertisements say!), it is excellent stuff, and I am very fond of it.

The Soudanese live principally upon this lugma, which is very nourishing. On a march each man carries his own bag of durra, or sometimes they have a supply in common. I think this is the case with our men, as I have often seen one big pot boiling over the camp fire, and they take their meals together, so I suppose they share the contents. Sometimes they only roast the grain, and eat it dry. Those that can afford it treat themselves to a little milk as we pass through the villages, and whenever we have a sheep killed they get a good

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share, you may be sure; so one way or another they don't starve, though their food is as simple as it can be. I think I told you in my letter from Suakin that their hair was rolled up in mutton fat! This is quite true: it is the one and only sort of pomade they know of or care for, but it is very seldom that they get the chance of obtaining the much desired luxury, for they cannot afford to buy sheep for themselves. I fear it will almost make you sick if I describe their manner of preparing the "coiffure" they most esteem, but it is so very extraordinary I cannot refrain.

After a sheep has been killed, and they have got nearly all the fat for themselves, they sit round in a circle on the ground, and half the number take large pieces of this fat and commence,—what do you think? you will never guess, and it is almost too disgusting to write; —they commence to chew it! Each man that has a good mouthful chews away as hard as he can in a round and round sort of determined manner, like a cow chewing the cud; and when his jaws are quite tired, he takes the piece out of his mouth, and hands it over to his next neighbour, who has as yet not commenced the exercise, but who now puts the identical piece

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into his mouth, and begins to do as the other did before him. A similar change takes place all round, from the chewers to the non-chewers, and this process is continued sometimes for an

COIFFURE OF MUTTON FAT.

hour or more, till the preparation is considered complete.

The one who is then to be the happy recipient of all this devoted exertion, is surrounded by two or three of the rest who divide his hair

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into innumerable portions, and roll each up into a lump of the aforesaid fat; so that his head resembles the appearance of being done up in a hundred, or more, curl papers of white grease.

Sir Samuel Baker speaks of this custom of the Arabs, of rolling up their hair in fat, in his *Nile Tributaries*. I do not remember now how he describes it; but it strikes me that he gave a very amusing account of one man, who, having been just adorned in this fashion, to his own extreme satisfaction, had had to go a message, or run by the side of a camel. In any case the man had to run in the heat of the sun, soon after the curling had been completed; and Sir Samuel said, though I cannot recall the exact words, that it was a race between the man and the fat; the man ran, and, melted by the double effect of tropical and animal heat, the fat ran also, and he was soon drenched in a bath which a patriarch of old might well have envied. We never allow any of our own particular servants, who carry our things and come near the tents, to put this abominable stuff on their heads; a full understanding was entered into on *that* point from the beginning; but to the camel drivers we are obliged to allow more liberty of action, and as we are not brought into

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immediate contact with them, it does not so much matter, although the fragrance of this "get up" is often enough to knock one down, even from afar off.

After we had passed through that alarming gorge which had the reputation of being a very den of lions, we encamped in a place which was considered likely to be free from such intruders; but nevertheless I assure you I closed up, and tied down every aperture of the tent that night as tightly as I possibly could,—for I was anxious to shut out not only any of these possible visitors but also *the fear* of them, and to get a good sleep in peace.

I do not really suppose that any beast, however wild, would make a raid into a well-guarded camp in the open, where there are plenty of people about; still less that it could or would penetrate into a tent,—but there is no knowing. It is a novel situation, and I cannot help having a qualm or two now and then; perhaps by and by, when I become more accustomed to it, I shall feel less apprehensive, and take things more quietly. . . .

I did get a good sleep after all the tying up was done; and though I did not feel quite so ready as I sometimes do to take part in calling

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the camp in the morning, I listened to the general arousing with a feeling, in the midst of my last doze, that I ought to be ready and willing to get up as I was still alive, and had not yet formed a supper for any hungry king of the desert.

We were later than usual in getting under way, as the men had not been astir till near six, and it is generally about three hours after the first movements are made before we are on the march; so it was nine o'clock before we were really off. There is always supposed to be a watcher at every camping-ground during the whole night. The drivers and servants assure us that they take it by turns, two hours at a time each; but it is indeed a rare occasion on which any one of them are up in the morning before we are.

These natives have the most insuperable objection to making an early start, which we are always anxious to do, because the weather is now becoming so hot that it is very trying to us to travel between noon and four o'clock in the afternoon. *They*, bred and born in the desert, do not feel this in the least; in fact I believe they prefer it, and cannot endure to be about until the sun is overhead, and pouring

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down his scorching rays upon them. The cool mornings and evenings we feel to be so reviving are apparently as the chill of winter to them, and they shirk it accordingly. If we could, we would always go on ahead by ourselves to the next camping-ground, and leave them to follow at their own slow pace; but several reasons prevent us from doing this. For one thing, after the experience we had of the new guide losing his way, we feel that we are not certain that anybody except the original one knows the road, and also (scamp, as in many ways he is) he is the responsible man for the honesty and behaviour of the rest; so we can neither go without him ourselves, nor take him away from them.

If the drivers were to be left to themselves they might do a hundred things that this man's presence may restrain them from. For instance they might steal the durra which is provided for the donkeys and the hajeen; or make far too free with the water in the girbas, which we always carry in case anything should prevent our getting on to the next wells; or, worse than all, they might possibly make havoc of our boxes in a search for the bags of dollars which they well know are in them.

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By the bye, I have never told you about *that.*

The way in which all money has to be carried in the Soudan is an added burden to the rest of the baggage. Nothing is accepted by the Arabs in the interior, but dollars; and, moreover, they must all be the "Maria Theresa" dollar, which bears the likeness and inscription of that departed Empress. They are very particular about receiving these dollars and no other; and there must also be the exactly correct number of little knobs in her necklace (I think it is seventeen); if there is even one deficient they will return the piece as false coin.

We had immense trouble, and it took a long time at Suez to overlook and examine all the dollars which we were to bring south, as we were anxious they should all be quite correct. The weight of these massive coins is terrific; to be carrying about several hundred pounds in huge silver pieces is no joke, I can assure you. This sort of thing makes one realise as keenly as anything does, the absence of civilisation in a land. How utterly worthless and foolish, in the eyes of these people, would paper money appear!—they have not even gold, and as to circular notes, a cheque, or an order on a

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banker, I imagine it will be many a long day before such things are even heard of in the Soudan.

At Kassala we may be able to get money advanced to us by European merchants, or perhaps a banker there, by an order on the bank at Cairo; but even then we shall have to take it with us in the same cumbrous form in which we are now carrying it, as nothing else passes current with the natives of the country districts.

We have had to divide this treasure into many different portions, which are tied up in sealed bags and distributed among the different boxes, that suspicion may not arise from the too great weight of any one in particular; sealing the bags with our own crest is also a safeguard against their being opened; but of course we are always obliged to keep one unsealed, and in a position where it can be easily got at, as we have to buy food and durra as we go along, to say nothing of chance purchases, such as our dogs, or a good camel or mule, if we were to meet merchants coming north with any.

Having this money with us on the march, and within reach of people whom we are unable to feel perfect confidence in, and as we are

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passing through a country where caravans are not unfrequently attacked by robbers, we feel that it is best, as a rule, not to get very far away at any time from the caravan. We do not keep always close by, but often go on ahead for an hour or two and halt until it comes up; but we never leave time enough for irrevocable mischief to be done, or go so far that we could not look up those in charge, in case anything suspicious should occur.

When it becomes dark, too, we like to be near, both on account of the possible robbers I have alluded to, and also from the fear of wild beasts, for then a rifle might be needed, and none of these men know enough of firearms to trust them with one. They might possibly shoot a camel, perhaps the best, which would be a terrible loss; or one of themselves, which I am inclined to think would not be so irreparable an evil! or, at any rate, they would be sure to do something equally ineffective and inàpropos in case of a sudden alarm.

We marched on Monday the 25th from about nine in the morning till two P.M., when we reached as lovely a place and as fair a scene as any that could exist in any land; and oh! how inexpressibly fair it seemed to me—who

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had felt that morning's march to be the most trying I had yet experienced—no words can tell. It was the camping-ground of "Wandik," from which I wrote to you while we were halting. The heat on the march had, after the first two hours, become almost intolerable, and produced a sensation of being internally roasted. But I cannot tell you of that camping-ground just yet.

This is the difference between African heat and that of India or the Malay Straits. I used to think I knew what the utmost heat that could be endured meant, in both those places, especially, as in Oudh I had passed two hot seasons in succession in the plains; but since coming to Africa I find that I have hitherto known literally nothing whatever about it. African heat penetrates and burns one through and through, scorching one deeply with real pain. The heat of other countries, though bad enough, as I myself can testify, is not in the least the same sort or quality of heat, and in my estimation can only be described in comparison as unpleasant. I know we are doing what would be universally considered a *mad* thing in coming to Africa and commencing a tour southwards at this season of the year. It is the time when every one that has been in the country during the winter

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months leaves it to go home; but, as we wish to pay it a long visit, if we become acclimatised in the hot weather we shall have nothing to fear afterwards.

That march of the 25th was certainly a pretty good commencement to the acclimatising process. My lips and face, which were blistered before, were worse than ever after it. The wind, which was excessively high all the way, though soft, blew little sharp atoms (mere dust, too small to be seen, but by no means too small to be felt) of the dry flinty sand into my skinned countenance, pricking it as sharply as though a hundred fine needles were being plunged in, and the pain was severe.

The ground over which we had come had been, as previously, very stony and uneven, though the soil had been light and dusty. Every particle of grass had been dried up long ago, not a vestige of a blade remained; and had I not been told so, I could never have imagined that anything green ever grew upon it.

The Arabs, however, tell me that after the rains the whole country is covered with the most beautiful short turf-like grass; and Charlie, who has known it at such times, says that these desert places are then like exquisite lawns,

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presenting the appearance of miles of parklike verdure, interspersed with mimosa bushes in full leaf.

I have to take these assurances on faith, and indeed a large amount of that virtue is required even to bring such a transformation scene before my mental vision. During the march we crossed the dry bed of a torrent called "Khor Karkoeb." "Khor" means the dry bed; "Karkoeb" was the name of the torrent. It was a steep descent of about fifty feet, the bed was about a hundred yards wide, and the ascent on the opposite side was the same height as the descent. We had some difficulty in scrambling up; the baggage camels, especially, found it hard work, as the soil was loose and shifting, and foothold was not easily obtained. "Prince," however, managed it valiantly. I felt much compunction in remaining on him, and was on the point several times of getting off, when I reflected that an unexpected movement on my part might cause him to slip, and the probability would be that we should then have both rolled together to the bottom of the khor.

We saw two large mountains in the distance; the first, "Jebel Darebab," lay about seven miles to the north-east of our route, and "Jebel

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Langeb" about five to the westward of us, farther south. It was in the Khor Karkoeb that I came near the dôm palms of the desert for the first time. I had seen a few in the distance soon after leaving Shankrat, but had not come close to them before.

The dôm palm is the tree that produces the vegetable ivory, and it is remarkable in several ways. It grows to an immense height, and all the foliage is at the top. The stem is very long and straight, and has no branches all the way up. The leaves come in a wide-spreading, enormous bunch at the top, and each fresh set of leaves grows out of a forklike division from the stem, from which another set grows.

The fruit, which was lying in heaps all over the ground, is about the size of an ordinary apple; the outside is a dry fibrous husk, most uninviting in appearance, but the Arabs eat it in spite of its tough stringy nature,—and I was induced to taste it. It has a strong flavour of gingerbread, but I found it impossible to swallow. I believe the Arabs not only eat it dry, but pound it up, mix it with water, and make a drink from it. This, after it has been strained, may not be so bad. The inside is a perfectly hard and exquisitely blue-white nut. Many people would,

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I have no doubt, call it pure white; but in my opinion there is the faintest tinge of blue-white in it. It is very lovely, and is called vegetable ivory. It appeared to me like what a fossilised "mangosteen" (the most exquisite fruit in the world, which grows only in the Malay peninsula) might be, if it could be fossilised without its appearance being spoilt.

Large dôm palms give splendid shade, for the mass of leafy branches is so thick and broad that it forms a perfect protection from even the piercing rays of this frightful sun, and the shadow is cast to a great distance. We could not resist the temptation of a halt for a short time under such friendly shelter; but we did not stop the camels, allowing them to wend their slow quiet way forwards in the temperature which I believe they as well as their owners enjoy, knowing that ere long we should overtake them.

I lay down on my "farrwah" in the soft sandy khor, right underneath the thickest part of the massive green overhead, and looked up into the grateful darkness above. It was such an intense relief to get out of the bright white glare; *that*, as well as the heat, is one of my perpetual troubles. For hours together this glare is often quite unbroken, and, in spite

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of my thick doubled veil, the effect is very painful. The darkness that I now gazed into —not absolute darkness, but the deep dark green, almost black, shade, just broken here and there by soft reflected lights—was as refreshing a sensation as was that of the coolness. We had an exquisite half-hour under those dear dôm palms, and I could scarcely bear to leave them; but it had to be done, and we went on again without another break till we reached the camping-ground, which I began to tell you of before, but the description of which I must reserve for another letter.

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LETTER X.

Resaid or Resai—Nearing Wandik—Wretched mohatta—Lovely valley—Watering camels and goats—The patient waiters—The invaluable bath—My precious treasures—Soudan prices—Exquisite camping-ground—A note of discord—The guilty Hussein—Self-interested camel drivers—A friend in need.

1st March.

I DO not know the name—or even if it has any!—of the particular spot at which we are halting just now. We are on our way to a station called Resaid, or it may be Resai. It is sometimes very difficult to make out the pronunciation of these natives, and when one tries to get them to be exact as to syllables, they often seem quite perplexed as to whether a word should end with any particular letter or without it. It not unfrequently happens that they differ amongst themselves as to terminations, and then I give it up as perfectly hopeless, and write the name the best way I can, giving the sound as nearly as possible that the majority

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seem to decide on. For instance "Aradeb," that I last wrote to you from, may be "Aradeb" or "Aradey;" but it seemed to me that the *b* carried it, and not the *y* (perhaps Max would say that is *why* "Aradey" did not win the day) —but it is too bad to foist off such an atrocious pun upon even a known punster! And now I want to tell you about Wandik, the pretty camping-ground that we came to on the 25th.

But first you must know how to pronounce it. It is simply "One Dick," with a slight stress laid on the "one." Think of your own one Dick and you will not forget it. I was never so much astonished to find myself in a pretty place as I was there. The country, as I said before, had been barren and desolate almost the whole way from Miteb, and the village even at Wandik did not look as though it could afford by any means an inviting shelter. After our halt in the Khor Karkoeb we went on again for about a couple of hours, and felt sure we must be nearing the police-station, when the servants who were with us sighted a couple of gazelle in the far distance.

Charlie was exceedingly anxious to get some meat for both the men and the dogs, as we could not tell at all what the resources of

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Wandik might be, and he determined if possible not to lose this opportunity. The country where the gazelles were was very flat, and with no shelter whatever upon it; in fact it was very much like the open plain which I described in one of my former letters, on which the wild asses were feeding. There was a good deal of rock and broken ground from where we saw them, and Charlie asked me if I would wait under the shade of these rocks while he went after the game. I agreed, and halted in a cleft, from which, however, I could not see the sport.

After waiting some time, and hearing a shot or two a long way off, the servants told me that the "Khawajah" was beckoning for his camel, and that they thought he would come round to the village by another path; and they advised me to join him there by a route which would be direct from where I was, which they pointed out. Taking some of them with me, and sending off the others with the camel, I set out.

We had not gone far along a rocky bit of ground on the edge of a hilly rise, when, to my surprise, I heard Charlie's voice behind me. How he arrived there I shall never quite com-

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prehend! and the immediately succeeding events put the question completely out of my mind. He beckoned to me to turn and come back. I had been making for the police-station, a wretched-looking hut, surrounded by a few others which were even worse in appearance, on the barren plain. He told me that below, in a valley we could not yet see, were water and trees, and that we could get a tent pitched and have a good rest. Joyful news was this,—the prospect of a halt was always welcome, and I felt particularly "done up" just then. A hundred yards more brought us to a rugged path at the head of a ravine which led straight down into one of the loveliest scenes I ever saw.

It was a perfectly green little valley, about 600 yards in length and 100 yards wide. The sward was as fresh as though it had been just watered, and there were numbers of beautiful palm trees of many different kinds in every direction,—not only dôm palms, but several other varieties. In one part, where these trees grew in a perfect grove, there were several large wells, and round these wells were a number of Arabs drawing water for an immense herd of camels and several flocks of goats.

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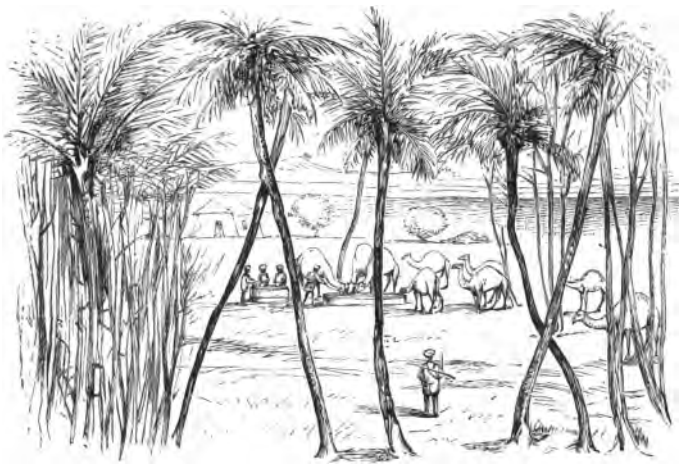
The animals were scattered about over the upper part of the valley, standing in groups or lying down in all sorts of picturesque attitudes under the trees. There was abundance of shade, and every living creature seemed to



CAMPING-GROUND AT WANDIK.

rejoice in the cool freshness. It was such a busy, pretty scene that I shall never forget it.

We dismounted, and sat down under one of the largest trees on the short fresh turf to watch all that went on. I was so interested in observing everything that my fatigue seemed gone in a moment. Delicious milk, frothing up in large gourds, was brought to us, and though it was

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goat's milk, no draught could have been more refreshing or acceptable.

The herdsmen kept calling to the camels the whole time with pretty musical cries, which the latter seemed quite to understand and to obey; and these cries resounded through the valley, not harshly or in an overpowering manner, but with a gentle sort of echoing sound, which added immensely to the poetry of the scene. There were between four and five hundred camels, they told us, yet the utmost regularity and method prevailed in the manner in which they were allowed to drink. The men were divided into two parties; those who drew the water and those who stood by to see that each camel was served in turn.

By the side of each well were long troughs, made of clay or moistened earth,—well built, thick, and substantial,—and into these the water was poured as fast as it was drawn from the wells. About six or eight camels were called up together to each trough, and it was not until the last one had finished that a fresh lot were allowed to drink. Others would run up in numbers at the same time, and strive to edge themselves in unseen, and to elbow away the first comers; but these stratagems would

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never succeed; the keen herdsmen knew exactly whose turn it was, and every cunning device was speedily circumvented. The older camels advanced sedately, the young ones came gambolling up and frisking round, eager to poke their noses into the longed-for draught whether it was their turn or not; and it was chiefly with these impetuous young things that there was trouble. But even with them a more animated command than usual, or a gentle push, would be quite sufficient; and though staffs and sticks were flourished aloft, they were seldom used, but appeared merely to be exhibited by way of warning, as a naughty child might be shown a rod.

The gentleness these Arab herdsmen displayed towards the flocks under their charge, and the careful manner in which they tended them, were quite noticeable; and whatever may have been the motives by which this was dictated, it was very pleasant to see, and added greatly to the delightful recollections I shall always have of Wandik.

When all the animals belonging to these nomad tribes had been watered, our poor baggage camels had their turn. They had been kept apart under a clump of trees which our

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men had selected for their quarters, and had been unladen in preparation for going to the wells before being turned loose in the valley to graze. I had often noticed, while the others were being watered, that their long necks were continually turned round and stretched out towards the water, and that their big patient eyes were wistfully gazing in the direction of their more fortunate neighbours; and when at last they were led up to the troughs they looked so much more tired and weary than those that had preceded them,—who had probably had no hard work for months previously, if, indeed, *ever*,—that I felt quite sorry for them, and I was much more inclined to have patience with their wearisome slowness than I had been before.

I had always thought till then that we had a very extensive caravan. Our two score "ships of the desert," winding their way over the barren plain or through a deep defile, had assumed rather magnificent proportions in my eyes; but now, after the four hundred or more that had been congregated in the valley, our little lot appeared as nothing, and I felt almost chagrined at the insignificant figure they cut.

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When all the strange flocks and herds were driven off, and the herdsmen had gone with them, it seemed quite dull, and I missed the lively party at first very much; but the refreshing prospect of a bath, a rest, and no more travelling for the next eighteen hours at least, was too delicious to produce anything but content.

The preparations for our halt had been going on from the first. A couple of tents were already pitched,—one of them a bath tent; lots of water had been drawn, and my turn came for the much-desired luxury, though in a different way from that in which the camels had enjoyed it. Mr. Shoolbred's inflatable bath came delightfully to the front, and was as usual invaluable. You would have to come into the Soudan, or some other uncivilised land, and go through the same sort of travelling that we have been doing of late, before you could realise the heavenly enjoyment of a bath, fresh clothes, and a clean white morning wrapper.

How grudgingly I took out the latter, and how many times I looked at it before I could make up my mind to put it on (knowing well that there was little or no probability of ever getting it washed properly again as long as I

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was in Africa, or of having the nice white frills regoffered), would be difficult to say! but the temptation was too strong to resist; the refinement of the luxury seemed to be in accordance with the beauty of the place, and I yielded. Besides, I reflected that I had yet another—an equally precious treasure—in my box, and that no occasion would probably arise more fitting than the present for which to save this one; so I made up my mind to wear it, and be perfectly happy for one afternoon and evening.

We were so anxious to reduce our luggage to the smallest possible quantity that I had scarcely allowed myself a dainty of any kind in the way of dress; and, as I believe I mentioned at first, our wardrobes did not *materially* swell the three tons we had with us! Charlie succeeded me in the enjoyment of similar simple luxuries, and then we dined.

We had bought a sheep (an immense sheep too), a fine fat fellow, for three-quarters of a dollar!—just think of that! Fancy getting a large sheep for a little over three shillings! and we had found no difficulty in obtaining it for that *vast sum;* though, had the owner known how much it was desired, the price might have been raised.

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It may be from the primitive simplicity of the lives of these people, and the absence of any wants but those pertaining to mere existence, that we find them so moderate in all their charges; or it may be from the absence of competition, or from the down-trodden and oppressed condition in which they habitually live; for the Egyptian Government allows them to keep little or nothing for themselves, and they are obliged to take prices as low as possible for all their produce, so that they are afraid to ask much from any one even appearing to have any power or authority. Yet even now things are much dearer in the Soudan than they were some years ago.

In comparing the prices we pay with what former travellers have paid, we find a considerable increase, especially in the price of durra; but, as the Arabs tell us, this varies at different times of the year and in different places.

The sheep that lived in or near that green valley were evidently the better for it, for the flavour of this mutton surpassed even that of Lagua. A "shoulder" was cooked by Ahmed to a turn, and we brought to it the unfailing sauce of hungry travellers, with the addition of

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unusual comfort in the circumstances surrounding and appetising the repast.

This ended, I lay down for a siesta. The tents had been pitched under large shady palms in one of the greenest parts of the valley, and it was actually cool enough to allow of little corners of the tent doors being opened to let the air enter and circulate; it was not necessary to shut out every breath as it was sometimes, and there was no gale that day, or at any rate it did not penetrate into that halcyon resting-place.

A soft, gentle zephyr came floating in, and it was delightful to listen to the quiet rustlings and gentle cracklings and swaying to and fro of the immense branches overhead in the dim heights above,—the friendly branches which threw down their deep grateful shade over our camp and far beyond it,—while bright broken lights flickered and flashed here and there upon the ground. From my resting-place I caught glimpses of the green sward rising in little knolls towards the upland, and I could almost have fancied myself in a tent on a shaven lawn in a midsummer day at home! To complete my happiness, I took George Eliot's beautiful *Scenes of Clerical Life* in my hand; but not even the sorrows of Amos

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Barton nor the loveliness of "Milly" could keep from me the slumber which was so delightfully in accordance with all the peace around.

Lulled by the general and unusual sense of comfort, I slept the sleep of the weary but contented traveller, and awoke about five o'clock, to be greeted by the welcome scent of wood smoke, which I knew indicated the approach of *that* kettle which was to crown the bliss of that afternoon! So then we had tea, and afterwards strolled out all round the ground. Everybody and thing looked happy and contented. The drivers and servants had had a good dinner, and you may be sure a good sleep too, and were then lighting fires, drawing water, and making various preparations for cooking suppers by and by; and the camels were wandering about or lying down, grazing off bushes or turf, and doubtless wishing that they might spend the rest of their lives in Wandik, with no more toilsome marches before them; and our poor dogs, which were beginning to be more and more "done up," were perhaps enjoying the rest more than any of us.

But alas, alas for the uncertainty of human happiness! how I grieve that I should have to write of any interruption to the general peace!

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Yet so it was; we had not wandered far in this happy valley when a note of discord was unexpectedly struck; soon another succeeded it, and the tranquillity and happiness were for a time obscured.

On coming to a halt daily, one of the first things to be done is to portion out the durra for each camel and for the donkeys besides. Sher Ullah and Ahmed discharge this duty, and very often we ourselves superintend it, as I am always anxious that the donkeys shall have their full share. On this occasion Ahmed came up to us and said that Hussein, the man who had constituted himself my especial protector, and who had apparently made it his chief care to look after the interests of "Prince," had without doubt stolen the portion of durra assigned for him, and cooked it for himself.

Indisputable testimony to the fact was adduced, and the guilty Hussein was summoned. Finding it useless to deny a charge to which there were several witnesses, the rogue discontinued the denial he had started with, which was indeed drowned in a torrent of alarming Arabic that was poured upon his head, which sounded so terrific that I felt quite glad I did not understand it all!

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This was the second time Hussein had been convicted of "petty larceny," and in my own mind I had but little doubt that it would not be the last by many a one. At Lagua he had stolen the liver and kidneys of the sheep which Charlie had fully intended to cook himself in a particular manner for me! but Hussein was evidently an epicure, and had known as well as his master what was what in the way of delicacies! On this occasion the temporary loss to my dear "Prince," which vexed and annoyed me sorely, was atoned for by more than a double "*feed*" then and there, and Hussein was threatened with instant dismissal.

This threat, which he made several ineffectual attempts to induce the "Khawajah" to retract, hung over him for the night; but on our start in the morning it was found that we were too short of hands to be able for our own sakes to spare him, so, with a diplomatic show of great condescension and most unwilling acquiescence in his request to "try him a little longer," he was restored to service but not to *favour*.

In severe and solemn tones, with a countenance lowering upon him, he was told to bring up "Prince;" and though I did not believe

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that his amusingly hang-dog look of assumed penitence would last long, I thought that a cold and lofty demeanour might possibly (though not probably) tend to check a repetition of misconduct, and I preserved it accordingly. Jar number two that I alluded to above was caused by the camel men.

They were exceedingly anxious that when we left Wandik we should leave also the route by which we had hitherto travelled, along the line of the telegraph wires, from mohatta to mohatta, and go instead by a road which led a good part of the way through their own country. They alleged want of water on the road we wished to go by—lions, robbers, and a very rough and difficult route. We were beginning to be quite perplexed and really to wonder what the truth was, when a very handsome and quite distinguished-looking non-commissioned officer, who had been in the valley in the morning, but whom we had not seen since, returned from the village, where, with a common soldier, he had been to collect tribute, and came up to speak to us.

He was an intelligent man, and Charlie at once told him the difficulty. He immediately advised us on no account to listen to the advice

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of the drivers; assured us that it was merely a device for passing through their own country; that the road proposed would take us considerably out of our way, and that as there was no track whatever in the direction they spoke of, we should find it much rougher than continuing the route we had hitherto chosen. He also hinted that all sorts of complications and difficulties might arise from a possible change of men if once they found themselves among their own people, and that we might have much trouble.

We felt only too glad to be primed with this counsel, and rejoiced in the good luck that, at this critical juncture, had sent us so able an adviser. A change of plan was no longer thought of, and leaving Charlie to have a talk with our friend, I went into the tent and finished my letters, scraps of which I had previously scribbled off at odd moments. I left off, however, before nine o'clock, as I was determined to make the most of the night, and at half-past six next morning we were in our saddles, saying good-bye to pretty Wandik, and setting forth on another of the fatiguing days which we could not but anticipate lay before us.

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LETTER XI.

Journey to Bulāk—Camping-grounds—Camel men deceive us —Noisy and excited—Cunning devices—Sweet revenge —Bright young Hadendoa hostess—Friendly memory— Goatherd pursued—Trust displayed by him—Ludicrous scene—Heat increasing.

ON THE ROAD BETWEEN TOGAN AND FELIK,
3d March.

THE journey from Wandik to Bulāk had been, as we feared it might be, almost as trying as that from Miteb to Wandik. The country was, as on former occasions, alternately sandy and stony, bare and barren ; the heat had been terrific, and the glare very painful.

We remained at Bulāk, after all, for the night, though on reaching it we had no intention of doing so. As I think I told you, Charlie on our arrival went out to look for game, and when he returned, expecting to find everything ready for a start, nothing had been prepared, and it was then too late to commence lading the camels.

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It was much the same story as at Sātrāb over again. These cunning deceivers, the camel drivers, had, for some reason or other of their own, without doubt determined that we should go no farther that night, and by a clever stratagem they entirely prevented our doing so.

They have never the slightest compunction in misleading us; and whether or not they are speaking the truth, and what their inducements may be to any special act of deception, it is often impossible to fathom until too late; but one can generally be pretty sure that there is an interested design lying at the root of most of their advice, which will very likely come to light sooner or later.

They had told us that water was to be obtained at Bulāk, and they took us to a camping-ground near which they said were the wells. Before, however, I continue the story, I ought to tell you what constitutes these camping-grounds. They do not always contain wells—the distance between the places where water may be found being perhaps too great for an unbroken journey—but they are, for the most part, tolerably smooth, open spaces, free from rocks, stones, or deep sand, where caravans, in going up and down the country, are accustomed

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to halt. They are chosen often, at this season of the year, in a ravine or the dry bed of a torrent, because there they will probably be sheltered from wind by the high banks on either side.

They must contain space enough to unload a caravan, and to lay merchandise, or the baggage of travellers, on the ground, where it will not be injured by stones or thorny bushes. The most desirable camping-grounds are, of course, those which have water, and care has to be taken before leaving these that the girbas shall be well filled, to make up for a possible deficiency on the intermediate ground.

One of our camels is told off as a water-carrier; three immense girbas, and a number of smaller ones, are the supply he takes, and even for our small party that quantity is always required. We are twenty in number now, including the traveller who, in spite of having his own water-skin, generally asks for water from ours; and besides the human drinkers there are the two donkeys and all the dogs. These animals consume an immense deal, and as the season advances they will want more! I doubt not that on going south from Kassala we shall require another camel, at least, for water only.

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But I must return to Bulāk. The drivers had told us that water was to be obtained there. It did not look a likely place, as there was no very high ground near, and only a few stunted mimosas and sickly-looking palms scattered about. We had no positive reason, however, to disbelieve them, and so it was settled that while we halted during the fiercest heat of the day, a detachment should go off and get the smaller girbas, that had been already emptied on the march, refilled. To kill two birds with one stone, the donkeys were to go also, and drink themselves at the wells, and bring back the skins when filled. The wind was tolerably high, so I had the little tent pitched; and as the country all round looked thoroughly uninteresting and bare, I retired into the shelter at once to rest and *write*.

At that time it was about two o'clock; Charlie did not return till half-past five, and then, to our astonishment, it came out that scarcely any one but the servants were in the camp. Sher Ullah said the camèl men had all gone off almost as soon as the master had left.

We were extremely annoyed, having wished to do two or three hours' marching that evening; but we now clearly saw that the drivers

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had never intended to go farther than Bulāk that night, and it was most provoking to feel that again we had been deceived by them.

This may have been a piece of revenge for our not going through their country as they had wished to do when we left Wandik, or it may have arisen from their great dislike to travelling late in the evening; but there was little doubt, from the noisy and excited state in which they returned about two hours later, that they had been spending the time they should have occupied in preparation for a start at some distant village, from which the camping-ground doubtless took its name. They did not come all at once, or all from the same direction, but straggled in one or two at a time, this probably being only additional cunning to mislead us as to where they had come from. The guide, that erring fellow who had long since proved himself to be incorrigible, now began to adduce all manner of lame and miserable arguments for our not having gone on, but he got no hearing. Charlie said he was too angry even to trust himself to speak to the man; he was simply dismissed with the assurance that on our arrival at Kassala he should be taken before the Pasha and there receive the reward he merited. Those

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who had gone to get the girbas filled brought them back empty, saying that the wells were dry.

The probability was that there were no wells at all in the neighbourhood; and had they brought water from the village, alleging that it came from the wells, they would have been betrayed, as they might then have been ordered to empty the large girbas and refill them with fresh water, which would have placed them in an ugly fix.

The cunning and curious devices of Hadendoa camel drivers are neither to be fathomed nor circumvented, and I shall indeed be thankful when we need their services no longer. The wind rose terribly towards night; sand and dust were blown mercilessly into everything, and it became extremely cold, but before ten o'clock all discomforts were forgotten in happy rest.

At twenty minutes past three I awoke and roused Charlie, who immediately set about awaking the camp, with such vigour, and so many effectual threats, that in a few minutes all were astir, and by half-past five we were actually *en route*. This in itself was a little bit of satisfactory retribution for the conduct of the

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past night, for I knew how the men hated being up so early. We went on without a break until ten o'clock. It was too early to think of going off the road for game; the wind was still terrifically high, and the country was, as it had been the day before, extremely rough, and made travelling very difficult. For the first two hours it was all deep, soft sand, which was fatiguing for the animals, and after that it was very stony.

At ten o'clock (it was the morning of the 27th) we reached the mohatta "Hadaweb," and found that the village had recently been burnt down. It must have been a large place, and there were the remains of some mud dwellings, whose broken charred walls were of quite an unusual height, and might have been dignified with the name of houses, showing that the village had been of greater importance than those we generally came across, which consist for the most part of straw or grass huts.

We dismounted and explored the ruins. It was a deserted desolate place, for no attempt had as yet been made to restore it, although they told us it was to be rebuilt. Only a couple of supremely dull, unintelligent men were to be seen, and one woman—she, however, formed a

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striking contrast to her heavy companions, and was the redeeming feature of the spot. She bore off the palm completely for both mental and physical qualities, and indeed would have stood a fair chance of successful competition with many of her own race or sex in any land. Bright-eyed, keen-witted, courteous, and chatty, without being in the least either forward or intrusive, she bade us welcome to her house, and told us all we wished to know. She was the only *young* woman who had ever come out, at any place, to greet us, and we were probably indebted to the ruined condition of the village (and the stupidity of the men) for her having done so.

She said the village had caught fire ten days before, one evening when the wind was blowing a gale, and in half an hour there was nothing left but what we saw. It is the greatest marvel to me that at this season of the year this sort of thing does not occur oftener. Everything is parched to a cinder; there is but little water left in the wells, none in the watercourses or torrent beds; the natives are always cooking, and having fires about, outside their houses, in the very centre of their villages; a high wind is continually blowing, and one

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spark, carried to the perfectly dry roof of a hut, would set the whole place ablaze in an instant.

I often think that if we ever settle down in any little village of our own of this kind I shall be constantly on tenterhooks about our being burnt out, and shall have to make stringent rules with regard to the fires, which I also reflect will probably never be carried out!

The bright young Hadendoa lady made us so welcome that she quite dispelled the desolateness of the place. She took us into her hut, —one of the very few remaining,—which had escaped, as two or three others had, owing to their being separate from the "*high street*" of the village, and to the lucky accident of the wind not having set in their direction. She offered us an angréb, the only seat an Arab can offer, as chairs they have none; and brought us a dozen delicious fresh eggs, and a good quantity of milk besides.

I shall always have a friendly recollection of that kind young hostess of the desert; she was a very bright star indeed, and deserved a better home than Hadaweb seemed capable of affording her. The rest of the journey seemed easier and pleasanter for having seen her.

We went on for two hours more, and halted

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about noon in the sandy bed of a big torrent. The ground was very broken and rugged, but not stony; and there was quite a little forest in the khor, and a good many palms here and there, so that we got tolerable shade.

Such a curious circumstance occurred by the way that I must tell you about it. We suddenly saw near this khor, at a turn of the road, about one hundred yards off, a man driving before him a large herd of goats. Immediately he caught sight of us he hastily turned them sharp off to one side, and made as though he would take them all away as quickly as possible. He was evidently afraid of having one, or some of them, or perhaps all the milk they might be able to give, demanded of him, or possibly seized by force.

This is not the first instance we have had of the terror the poor people live in with regard to their few little miserable possessions, and clearly shows to what tyranny they have been subjected, and how much they dread it. We did not wish to steal the poor fellow's goats, nor anything belonging to him, but to buy milk, if it was to be had. Charlie shouted, and made signs trying to indicate what we wanted, but all to no purpose. The man began to run, and to

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make oracular noises to his flock, which ran also, and the whole cavalcade made a wild dash in the direction of some jungle or brushwood, into which I suppose they hoped to escape ere we could come up with them. We *really* wanted the milk very much, and so we followed. Ahmed, who was with us, ran ahead, and got up to the shepherd, the chase becoming exciting as both neared the jungle, stopped him, and told him what we wanted. He at first said that it was "impossible," that there was not a drop of milk to be had, and that he was hurrying away to the wells.

By this time *we* had reached the scene of discussion, and Charlie produced a piastre; the man looked at it, and said somewhat sulkily that he would try if a little could be found. One more piastre was then exhibited, and his countenance considerably lightened. We gave him a skin to fill with milk, and he advanced towards the herd. He was a good fellow, I am sure, and I felt the next moment quite an admiration for him, for before going, though he had actually received no money from us, but had only been shown it, he brought his spear, the dearest possession of an Arab, and a nicely-cut well-smoothed stick he carried, and laid

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them down by our camels—the only pledges he could give that he would return with the milk. It is needless to say that he was not allowed to leave them; we would not have had him think for a moment that while he showed us so much confidence we could distrust him; so he took them up again and went off to his flock.

Then began the most ludicrous scene imaginable. It was truly laughable. The man advanced stealthily and quite slowly, halting occasionally, and as though there were no design in his movements, until he was quite close to a large goat; he then made a swoop upon the animal, and seized it by one of its hind legs, which, in spite of the violent kicking and plunging that ensued, he at once tucked snugly away under his left arm! He then in the most adroit manner—evidently well accustomed to the work—held the skin open with one hand and milked the goat with the other.

Not a drop was lost, and the loud bā-ā-ing and bleating that went on in no way disconcerted him or caused him to discontinue. He went through the same process five or six times in succession, diving after each big goat in turn until he had filled the skin, which he then

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brought back to us. We felt ready to offer him any amount of piastres, not only for the milk, but for the amusement he had afforded us, and he seemed more than satisfied with what he got.

In the shady khor we then lunched; and afterwards on a rug, with a little pillow that is always slung to the camel saddle, I lay down under a big bush and had a good rest, for I was extremely exhausted. I grieve to say that I find the marches are fatiguing me far more than they did at first: this may be from the increasing heat, as that is already becoming much fiercer than when we left Suakin, and what it will be as time goes on I do not dare to think. We set off again, about four o'clock, but stopped at five for tea, and then went on without a break till eleven. We had not reached either a village or mohatta, but I was too much done up to go any farther, so we chose our own camping-ground, had a tent pitched, got a hasty supper, and halted for the night.

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LETTER XII.

Arrival at Felik—Aradeb—Greek merchants—Two sheep for a dollar—The Indian "kukri"—Collecting tribute—Oppression of the Soudanese—A "zareeba"—My first sight of the mirage—An unpleasant circumstance—The perfidious traveller—The Swiss rifle.

FELIK, *4th March.*

TO-DAY we have come to the first big town on the road. It is called Felik, and is really an important place for an Arab city, as it contains a telegraph office, which none of the other police-stations hitherto have done. The station-master who manages the telegraph, is a very tolerably educated man. He speaks French, and is vastly above the average of any one we have yet come across, since leaving Suakin. He is an Arab, but has a keen intelligent face, and altogether a nice appearance; but I must not begin to speak about him yet. There is not much to relate, either about Aradeb or of what happened between it and Togan, so this letter will not be a long one; and as we are to have a good rest

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here, I hope, in spite of being somewhat tired, to have it ready to go by the mail to-morrow.

About seven o'clock on the morning of the 28th we started for Aradeb, which we reached at noon. The road was stony and rocky all the way, composed principally of fragments of broken quartz, but the camping-ground at Aradeb was a very pretty one; with plenty of big palms about, and good wells too. We got delicious cow's, as well as goat's, milk there, which was a luxury we had not enjoyed for a long time. It was not nearly equal to lovely Wandik; but, except that, the prettiest station we had yet come to. As we neared it we saw, to our surprise, that tents were already on the ground, boxes and baggage were piled on one side, camels were grazing, and Arabs moving about among them. In a few moments our servants ascertained that other European travellers were there, and we were eager to know who they were. I earnestly hoped it might be Colonel Gordon,—"Gordon Pasha," as he is called in the Soudan,—for we knew he was in the country, and he is always moving about so quickly from place to place that no one can be sure where he may be found next. To meet him is a pleasure I have been hoping for ever since we left

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Suakin. I was, however, doomed to disappointment. The travellers turned out to be two Greek merchants. They were not just then in the camp, but Charlie afterwards saw them, and had a talk with them in French, as they knew little or no English; but I did not see them, as they were only a short time on the ground after we reached it, and were indeed then making preparations for a start; they were on their way home, and just for a minute or two I think I began to envy them a little bit.

At this place I had a repetition of all the luxuries I enjoyed at Wandik, including the white morning gown again; and after my letter to you was written I did little else than sleep all the afternoon and evening, for I was more tired than I have been yet. I am still suffering much from the burnt condition of my face and lips; and I now almost despair of getting them right until we reach Kassala, and I have a good many days together inside a house, where I shall be protected from this scorching blast.

At Aradeb we got a fresh supply of durra for the donkeys, and the cheapness of our preceding purchases was here surpassed in an almost amusing degree by our being able to

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buy *two* fat sheep for a dollar,—*i.e.* for two shillings and twopence apiece.

The next day was the first of March, and the month "came in like a lamb." There was no wind blowing, which is always such a comfort, especially when preparing for a start, for then very often we have to take our breakfast without the tent, which has been or is being rolled up, and packed away on a camel.

When there is a gale as much sand as sugar is apt to get into one's coffee; real veritable sand, which does not even pass for sugar, as it is sometimes adroitly made to do at home, and as much dust as pepper into our eggs, but that is undisguised also, and unpalatable in proportion. These little inconveniences often make me cross to commence with, and then I must confess *some of them* are apt to have a bad time of it!

We reached the next police-station, "Resaid," the same evening, and it was when we were halting half-way on the road, under the shade of a big rock about noon, while lunch was being prepared, that an accident happened, which showed how terribly the heat is drying up and rendering everything brittle, whatever it may be.

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There were some scraggy mimosas close to the spot that we wanted for our resting-place, and with too great zeal to remove a thorny branch that came just in my way, I seized Charlie's pet "kukri" (an enormous Indian knife), and began chopping at it. This knife was one of several which were given him by Jung Bahadar when he was in Nepaul, during the Duke of Edinburgh's shooting tour there.

One of them is very magnificent, in a case of crimson velvet and gold, and kept only for *show;* but the one we have with us is such splendid steel that the temptation to use it cannot be resisted. Feeling sure that no branch could stand before this weapon, I made a dash at the one that annoyed me, and laid it low; but alas! I also laid the pet kukri low, for the blow split the ivory handle, which had till then stood any amount of chopping, in a grievous manner, making a long rent just below the blade. The steel was unharmed, but the beauty of the knife was gone, and I was very vexed. It was not the vigour of my stroke, I assure you, that caused the accident, though it does sound as though I had done something very desperate indeed; it was simply the effect of the heat, which had completely penetrated the

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ivory, separating all its fine fibres, and rendering it incapable of resisting any sudden blow; and no doubt, as time goes on, many other *casualties* of this kind will occur.

While we were halting at this place we became aware of two men on camels coming towards us from the far distance. They were riding very fast, and as they drew near we saw that they were in uniform. I began to feel quite alarmed; it looked as though we were being pursued. They did not "require" us, however, and proved to be two Egyptian soldiers going through the country to collect tribute. It gave me a shudder to see them, for I cannot but believe that the stories we hear on all sides of the tyranny exercised by these tax-collectors must be true. The people assure us that over and beyond the lawful rates they are obliged to pay, almost every farthing they can make is demanded of them, and seized by force; and that all sorts of stratagems are resorted to to find out what they have, and that when it is discovered it is constantly taken from them. Hiding their earnings even is often useless, as the most rigorous search is frequently instituted for any savings.

They have no incentive consequently to

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cultivate their land, or make more than is absolutely necessary to pay their rents, and thence arises their wretched state of poverty, and the degraded condition of deceit engendered by oppression, in which they habitually live. This wrong-doing can, however, only be *indirectly* attributed to the Egyptian government. The people are for the most part thus cruelly fleeced by the soldiers employed to collect the tribute, who rob and cheat for their own benefit, and the chief root of the evil lies in the unreliability of these men; but there are doubtless also other evils behind, lying far below the surface, which create the wrong, but which are too complicated and involved to enter into just now.

We slept in the travellers' hut at Resaid; it was a long straw shed of the kind and shape called a "Racuba." The policemen at the mohatta were very civil and attentive, as we have invariably found them. Poor fellows, they seem so glad of a kind word and a little friendly notice; I am sure, as I think I have said before, that under a just government, and with fair treatment, all the people in the Soudan would become quite a different race, for they show so many signs of being redeemable. They brought us two angrébs and lots of milk,

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but we did not have much talk with them as it was late—nine o'clock or past, and we were very tired.

All the camels, the donkeys, and the dogs, were brought inside the mohatta ground, which was protected by a thick "zareeba" (a deep thorny hedge, placed round every station to keep out wild beasts), for the men told us (and the necessity for the zareeba confirmed their assurance) that there were numbers of these in the neighbourhood—principally, as before, hyenas and lions.

However, within this protection we received no harm, and passed a peaceful night. The ground was very sandy and dusty. Deep masses of a mingled combination of both covered everything, and it was quite heavy walking all round and about the station.

The next morning we caught sight of the two soldiers who had passed us on the road; they were going from house to house in the village, and I could not but fear that they were carrying terror with them, and leaving heart-burnings behind; but after all I may have been doing them injustice. We scarcely saw anything of the police in the morning, and none of the villagers came out to speak to us; prob-

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ably the former were on duty in consequence of the presence of the other officials, and the villagers were doubtless, from the same reason, of necessity within their houses.

We started in a somewhat grim silence and solitude, and without the usual friendly salutations which often sent us so agreeably on our way; and I again attributed the absence of sociability to the damping influence of the soldiers' presence.

The next station was "Togan," about twenty-two miles away, but this was too great a distance for us to have much hope of reaching it that night, as the heat is becoming daily too intense for anything like forced marches; and though we are very anxious to get on to Kassala as quickly as possible, we are not obliged to do more in the twenty-four hours than we like, so that we can halt whenever we please.

The country between Resaid and Togan was again very flat, and completely covered with small stones. There were no more dôm palms to be seen, which showed that no river or water-course was near.

It was on this march that I first saw the mirage of the desert, and I shall never forget it. I could not but believe that we were coming

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to a large lake. The country was so flat and bare that there was nothing to reflect in it; it simply looked like a placid sheet of water, and I firmly believed that it was so: even the assurances of the Arabs could hardly undeceive me. As we approached, however, the appearance gradually faded away till it was completely gone. It did not disappear all at once, but by degrees, like a dissolving view; the edges of the lake first seemed to recede, then not to exist; afterwards the appearance of depth and body of water seemed to go, and by and by we were riding over the bare ground on which the illusion had lain so delusively but a few minutes before.

This appearance was constantly repeated in larger or smaller forms. We saw it half a dozen times, and it was always much the same in effect.

At noon we halted for lunch, but the shade was very bad; a few scrubby bushes in a slight declivity. were all the shelter we could get. Charlie made the servants spread several large ox-hides over these bushes as a sort of temporary tent, and they formed a capital substitute. . . . A rather unpleasant circumstance occurred at this juncture, which somewhat disturbed the harmony of our party.

Ahmed suddenly discovered, to his surprise,

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that several of his clothes were missing, and also some certificates of good conduct that he had obtained previously while in service at Massowa and Suez.

He brought his bag to the Khawajah in great dismay, and, turning out his things, explained what was lost;—inquiries were made all round, and suspicion pointed *to the traveller!* A search was instituted, and, I grieve to say, the missing articles were found in his possession. The ingratitude and perfidy that this displayed filled our whole camp with dismay; the little peccadilloes of Hussein with regard to kidneys and durra seemed as nothing in comparison, and a general blank fell upon the party. The traveller, who had given himself out as a merchant, merely accompanying our caravan by way of protection to himself on the road, had always seemed so quiet and respectable that he was the last man we should have suspected of such an action.

The Khawajah, however, took him to a little distance, and there remonstrated in terms of such serious import that we trust nothing of the kind will occur again; but he will be an object of suspicion for the rest of the march, and this in itself is very unpleasant. . . .

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The only game that we saw on the road was one gazelle, and I could not resist the temptation of a shot at it! It was my first shot in Africa: I fired with a Swiss "Fetterlich" rifle, which has a hair trigger, and is my favourite weapon. It was a long shot, and I did not get the gazelle; for which I was very sorry, as I think I hit it. It ran off limping slightly, poor thing, and I trust the wound was but trivial.

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LETTER XIII.

Togan—Immense flight of Guinea fowl—My wedding trunk deserted—Alarm of lions—The tracks visible—Mirage again—The Felik station-master—Extraordinary costume of slave girls—My slumber is disturbed—Our host says his prayers—I exclaim aloud !—A woman, a donkey, or a dog—Flattering !

HAJĀRO, *5th March.*

I WAS not able, as I hoped to have been, to finish the account of our marches to Felik in my last letter, so I will run quickly through the few that are left and pass on to Felik itself, where a circumstance happened which I shall never think of except without a good laugh against myself. It was so very funny that I must tell you about it, but I shall reserve it for the "*bonne bouche*" at the end, and you must first go back with me to the dusty road.

We had not been able to reach Togan on the 2d, so we spent the night encamped in a small khor, and were off again at seven next morning. About two hours after starting we got to the police-station, and it was without

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exception the most miserable place we had yet come to. There were only two or three huts besides the mohatta, and the whole place was wretchedly poverty-stricken, and nothing was to be had but durra. We waited for the baggage camels to come up, and while we were halting the police made us some lugma. It was so good of these poor fellows to offer us the only thing they had! They prepared it without our asking, in big wooden bowls,—and for about tenpence they made enough for ourselves, six dogs, and five servants. They had no milk, no eggs, no sheep, nothing but this lugma; and the whole place looked desolate and wretched.

The country was so bare and uninteresting after leaving Togan, and the place itself had been so miserable, that I felt quite low-spirited for some time, and was glad of even the small diversion of coming suddenly upon an immense flight of Guinea fowl. There were a hundred or more of them together, and Charlie got several at one shot by firing into their midst. About half-past ten we reached some broken ground and a khor, near which was a good-sized bit of jungle—in fact quite a copse (if you can imagine large dôm palms and all kinds of Eastern foliage in a copse); and the men told

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us that about half a mile off were wells. On this occasion we knew, from inquiries made at Togan, that they were speaking the truth, and, as we were satisfied with the shade we had found, we despatched a camel, the donkeys, and some of the men, for water, and remained where we were. We were to stop till four o'clock or later, in the afternoon, to avoid travelling in the heat; and so we took advantage of the cool place and leisure to overhaul our baggage. Many of the trunks were getting already into a terribly dilapidated condition, and some of the boxes of stores were half empty and wanted rearranging, so we set to work to see what was to be done.

Fancy my discovering that the largest of my wedding trunks, that you and I had so carefully selected not ten years before, and that I had thought would last a lifetime—it seemed so impenetrable and strong—was all but completely "to pieces," and that it could not be relied upon any longer. I looked at it with sincere sorrow—it had been such a good friend and faithful ally, and had already travelled with me so many hundred miles. Alas! it was not now worth the carriage, and, after divesting it of its contents, we left it there, under a dôm

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palm—the relic of what it had been—to return to dust in the midst of the desert. I had always regarded that particular box with somewhat of affection and romance, and as we moved away from the ground in the evening I almost felt that I was shamefully deserting an old friend! It was a melancholy finale, but could not be avoided.

About nine o'clock we got into a part of the country covered with tamarisk bushes, which grew high and thick on either side of the narrow path. The road was very stony and rough, the wind was high, and it was altogether not too pleasant, when we suddenly met a man and his wife, who were hurrying along in the opposite direction, in great agitation and alarm. They begged us to turn back at once, warning us that the country was full of lions, and saying that their cow, which, with its calf, they had just before been driving along, had been seized by a lion, that had leaped out of the bushes and jumped upon it. They would scarcely stop to speak to us, seeming to fear that each bush concealed a similar enemy, and before we could determine our own line of action they were gone. We did not wish to turn back, and there was no possibility of camp-

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ing just then, so there appeared to be no alternative but to go on. We took the precaution of firing off a rifle, and (not feeling too secure) proceeded. In a little time we came to an open space, and, knowing that it was useless to try to reach Felik that night, we halted. The same precautions were taken as on former occasions in dangerous places. A large fire was lighted, all the animals were drawn into a circle round it, and our tent was pitched close beside. More rifles were fired off the last thing at night, and the men of their own accord volunteered to keep watch, two at a time, till morning. This, I believe, for once they really did, being probably too much alarmed themselves to be able to sleep, and for a wonder they roused us at five o'clock, or even earlier. I think they wished to get away from that bit of land as soon as possible. As the camels had been partly packed even before we were called, all was speedily ready for an early start, and by 6.30 we were on the march.

The story of the people we had met the evening before was soon confirmed. On a sandy bit of road the tracks of lions were soon discernible, and we actually came across the place where, no doubt, the cow had been dragged off. The

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bushes were much broken, and the ground was *lined*, as though a heavy weight had been pulled over it. The tamarisk jungle was thick just there, and none of our party, even by daylight, felt inclined to penetrate it; our object was not lions, but to get to Kassala, so we did not stop.

At ten o'clock we halted under a tree for an hour, as I was getting very tired (to eat biscuits and drink curaçoa!), and we reached Felik soon after noon. Again, on approaching Felik, we saw the mirage. There it was even more delusive than before, for everything on the plain was reflected in it—houses, tents, Arabs, camels; every object, animate and inanimate, was mirrored as clearly in the unruffled surface as though we had been looking into the clearest water.

Again I could hardly believe that every reflection would vanish, but again as we neared the town they did vanish, and the objects that had appeared to be reflected alone remained high and dry upon the dusty plain, and once more we rode over the parched sand in which they had but so shortly before appeared in an inverted position.

At Felik we went straight to the diwan, next to which—indeed under the same roof—

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is the telegraph office. The Arab station-master came cordially out to meet us, bade us welcome, and gave us up his own quarters, which, primitive as they were, were more comfortable than those appropriated for general travellers.

He spoke a little French, but was too eager to hear all that he could of what was going on in the world beyond his own narrow limits, to allow him to converse in any language but his own; and while I was under difficulties achieving a bath and fresh toilette in an adjoining hut, Charlie talked away with him in that charming tongue. He had presented us with a sheep, which, according to the notion of utmost hospitality in the Soudan, had been brought up to the door of the diwan alive (and loudly bleating!) for our inspection—immediately before being taken away to be transformed into mutton!—and later on, when we had dinner, I had to steel my nerves and shut my thoughts against the remembrance of that unfortunate animal, whom I had seen in such a flourishing condition only a short time before.

It was here that I saw for the first time the extraordinary dress of the young unmarried girls who are employed as household servants

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among well-to-do Arabs. These girls are, like many of the negro police, slaves from Central Africa, and wear only a deep thick fringe of leather from the waist to just below the hips, and also a leather band round their shoulders, to which are attached large jars when they go to the wells to draw water. An extremely stout but comely girl, with splendid dark eyes and a gentle kind face, thus attired, brought us in coffee immediately on our arrival, and, as you may imagine, I was filled with surprise at her very unusual costume. This is the accepted and appointed uniform of all unmarried slave girls; they would not be allowed to wear anything else!

In the course of the afternoon our host absented himself, and we heard through the thin partition the incessant click of the telegraph dial, and marvelled exceedingly what sudden accession of news had occurred, as he had previously told us that there was "never any business at all to be done officially." It then struck us that *we* were the news, and that he was probably having a long gossip with the telegraph clerk at Kassala about us, and announcing our intended arrival there in the course of a couple of days. I should have much liked

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to know what he said of us!—but my curiosity was not to be gratified.

Very early in the evening I determined to go to bed, for I was excessively tired; and I was tired to death, too, of the incessant chatter of our loquacious friend, who drew upon the unfailing resources of Charlie's good nature to a cruel extent, and kept him talking for hours. To do this station-master justice he really was a very clever fellow, and appeared to be thirsting for information about all the countries in Europe, and England in particular.

I bore with him as long as I was able, but at last, however, I became utterly exhausted, and begged Charlie to intimate that I wished to retire. Our host instantly rose, and cordially wishing us good-night went away. It was about ten o'clock, and my eyes, which had been aching with fatigue, were just closing in happy slumber, when I was suddenly and painfully aroused by a low murmur on the other side of the wooden partition. For a moment I took no notice, thinking it would cease as unexpectedly as it had begun, but the fallacy of this hope soon became apparent; the murmur increased to a very distinct sound, the voice rose, a sing-song sort of chant commenced, and it

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was evident to me that our host was saying his prayers. Unwilling to interrupt him, yet cross beyond measure at being so disturbed, I said nothing for a time. Soon, however, the refrain rose to a higher and yet higher pitch, the animation and fervour increased, the length of devotion appeared likely to be interminable, and I was thoroughly awake.

Awoke too was my temper! I feared that, feverish and restless, I should toss about till morning, and that the lovely sleep I had been sinking into a few moments ago was gone for ever. At last, in cautious accents I ventured to call softly across the room to Charlie, begging him to remonstrate, to represent the case, and to ask our friend to adopt a *sotto voce* tone. To my joy and astonishment, instantly I spoke the voice ceased, and I believed that the case had been apprehended without remonstrance, and that I should not be again disturbed.

I immediately conceived the most exalted notion of this Arab's refinement and consideration, and under these happy influences was again on the verge of slumber, when, to my consternation and dismay, a repetition of all that had just occurred took place! First the murmur, then the louder tone, lastly the chant;

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one difference only was perceptible, the enunciation was very much more rapid than before. No words can paint my feelings. I was incensed to a degree I could not describe, and forgetting, I fear, all courtesy, expressed my impatience aloud in accents of unmistakable indignation.

Again, as before, the prayer stopped; again my thoughts relented, and again I was just about to sleep, when you will hardly believe it, but so it was, the identical circumstances were repeated. I was this time nearly mad with rage and astonishment. Every good feeling I had accredited the man with vanished from my mind; every good feeling I possessed, I fear, vanished also; and I was on the very point of again expressing what I felt, when Charlie exhorted me to allow him to accomplish his service in peace as he was evidently bent on going through it.

I resigned myself and complied, when very soon a singular change took place in my wounded feelings. I am sorry to connect the idea of amusement in even the remotest manner with a religious exercise, but I cannot but confess that my risible faculties during the next ten minutes were put to a severe test. The *gabble*

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that ensued was ludicrous beyond expression! If words were formed, it was certainly a masterpiece of enunciation, for seldom could any have been emitted in any language with the amazing rapidity that our friend now achieved; it was like speaking by machinery, the whirr and buzz were terrific, and there was scarcely time for any modulation. When the race ceased *I* felt quite exhausted, and what the devotee himself must have suffered I cannot imagine.

For some time I had a nervous apprehension that we were not yet free from a repetition of the storm, but the calm lasted; a few indistinct sounds of moving about took place, and all was perfectly quiet.

The next morning, when Charlie was again conversing with our host, he adroitly introduced the subject of religion, and inquired if it was he who had been engaged in the devotional manner we had heard the evening before, and if so, why he had thought it necessary to use such haste. The man replied that he belonged to a particular sect, which obliged him to repeat his prayers aloud, and which also held as one of their most stringent rules, that the voice of either "a woman, a donkey, or a dog," if heard at any time during the service, necessitated the

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commencement again from the very beginning of the whole routine; and that I having been the unwitting cause of twice throwing him back, he felt it absolutely necessary to put his utmost speed forward, for, had my voice unluckily occurred again, even when within the last word, he would have had to return to the first, and repeat the entire ritual!

The explanation, so flattering to my sex, amused me highly; and I determined never again, whatever personal inconvenience I might suffer, to remonstrate, either directly or indirectly, when religious observances were going forward, lest I should make matters worse; having, as it unluckily happened on the present occasion, completely defeated my own object by doing so.

I am bound to say that the good-will of this kind Arab seemed in no way diminished towards me, and whatever his creed might be, I could but give him the credit of forbearance which I had failed in. We parted the best of friends about six o'clock in the morning, when our little caravan was again *en route* for Kassala.

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LETTER XIV.

Arrival at Kassala—Halting for the night—Land full of lions—A hyena intrudes—Camp aroused at five o'clock—The pioneers start—Not a tree upon the plain—We don't know the way—Off the track—On into the heart of Kassala—Completely at a loss—The Italian lady—Scouts suggested—The Pasha and officers—Charlie walks in—The fiction of Hussein Kabiri.

KASSALA, *8th March.*

AT last we have reached Kassala. How glad I am to write that date none can tell! We got in on the 6th. Looking in my pocket-book I see it was Ash Wednesday; but whatever I *ought* to have felt, I could not possibly have experienced any feeling that day but one of rejoicing! I was so *very* glad that our long march had ended, and that we had some prospect for a short spell of life that will not be quite so trying as it has been during the last fortnight.

We shall be here, in all probability, from the time we arrived, for ten days or more, so I shall be able to send you many budgets, and to record events as they go on. Already I

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have much to relate about our entrance, or mine rather, into Kassala, which was attended by some of the most perplexing circumstances that have yet happened, though, now that they are over, I can have a good laugh at them, and feel, or *fancy*, that I did not care a bit.

After we left Felik and our most devout

KASSALA.

Arab friend! we went on till noon, when we reached Hajārio, a pretty station, where the police were as usual very attentive. We bought a sheep, by which the camp in general, including men and dogs, benefited; also durra and milk, and started again at five o'clock for a camping-ground called Jammâm, where at ten o'clock we halted for the night.

I did not like the last few hours of the march at all, for the country was covered with

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tamarisk bushes of unusual height and thickness, and they were very much closer together than any we had passed before; there were also many palms, and in some places quite dense bits of jungle, and lurking behind or among any of these coverts might have been the dreaded four-footed foes; our drivers told us the land was full of them. There was no moon, and on the way we passed a deserted mohatta, which gave (as a deserted house always does) a desolate, weird feeling to the scene, and increased the general gloom of everything. We were obliged, however, to halt, as it was impossible to reach Kassala that night; so we had a tent pitched, and fires lighted on the outskirts of the encampment, while several of the men and servants kept watch together till the morning.

Their apprehensions as to wild beasts were soon verified. The tent had not long been up when Charlie, who had been arranging things inside, left it to fetch something that was required, and clearly saw, by the light of the first fire that had been kindled, a large hyena coming swiftly across the camping-ground, straight in the direction of the tent, close to which the dogs were tied up. He had not

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his rifle in his hand, and if he *had* had it, there were too many people moving about, and the light was too uncertain to admit of his having aimed, so the only thing to be done was to send the intruder, instead of a bullet, a shower of terrific yells.

The huge beast turned but slowly. He was either too daring, or too much accustomed to caravans, to be greatly alarmed, and probably retired with full intentions of repeating his attack later. Other fires were, however, swiftly built up—the much wood about the ground rendering this comparatively easy—and quickly lighted, and every one being now doubly on the alert, no subsequent enemy ventured to approach. A rifle was as usual fired off, and this was repeated at intervals until we went to sleep; one of the servants was then given a weapon with powder only, no bullet, and told to discharge it into the air in case he should think there was real cause for alarm; otherwise to remain quiet, and not to disturb us unnecessarily.

Next morning the camp was aroused by five o'clock. I felt so utterly tired that, after trying to rise, I was obliged to lie down again, and Charlie then proposed that he and the guide,

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who professed to know Kassala well, should go on to look for a house, and that, as the road was quite straight and could not possibly be mistaken, I should follow by and by when I was more rested; and he promised to come back and meet me before I reached the town.

I gladly consented, and the plan was made the more feasible by the guide volunteering the information that there were large trees in abundance near the entrance to the town, and that, should the Khawajah not have met me before I came to them, I could dismount and rest in the shade until he arrived. Everything seemed to be as simple as possible; and soon after six, the servants having received all necessary instructions, the pioneers started.

Feeling there was no need for hurry, and, in fact, that it would be well to give them plenty of time, I went to sleep again for an hour, then leisurely dressed and had breakfast, and about eight o'clock set off with the caravan, mounted as usual on "Prince." I kept with the baggage camels for rather more than an hour, when it began to get excessively hot, and I reckoned that at their slow pace they would not reach Kassala till past one o'clock, as we had been between ten and twelve miles distant from it at

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Jammâm. I accordingly determined to go on ahead, and wait under one of the trees the guide had spoken of.

Hussein and Ahmed, with the other donkey and two of the dogs, accompanied me, and I set off at a brisk pace. The road was, as the guide had said, quite straight, and the tracks were too numerous for us to mistake it: the country was flat, and the ground pretty hard earth, and perfectly bare; so it was easy enough to get along. On we went steadily for miles, till at last Kassala hove in sight. I saw the wide-spread mass of gray walls stretching in numerous directions over the plain, and arrived at the conclusion that it was a larger city than I had imagined it to be.

Then I looked for the trees. Not a vestige of anything in the nature of even a shrub was to be seen; but as we were yet very far off I thought that I possibly might not be able to see them yet! or that some of the houses on the outskirts perhaps concealed them, and did not as yet experience much, if any, misgiving. At last, however, the truth became evident—that same faithless guide, Hussein Kabiri (let his name for ever be written in the blackness it deserves), had again deceived us—there was

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not a tree upon the plain. Hotter and hotter beat the sun, scorching as only an African sun can scorch; and to remain in it and outside the town was impossible; yet, what to do or where to go was a problem.

There appeared to be not one, but twenty different entrances to Kassala, and which to choose, or by which direction to reach Charlie, and how to find him, both the servants and I were totally at a loss to conceive. There was nothing whatever to indicate that one street was, *par excellence*, the right entrance to the town; and if we could have settled *that* question, the other—of Charlie's whereabouts—would still remain unsolved. However, "nothing venture, nothing have;" going boldly forward we plunged into the nearest at hand, and wandered on. Children playing in the streets, and a few loiterers in doorways, stared at us amazed; but for the most part Kassala was indoors, and happily few observed us. The heat, even at ten o'clock in the morning, was severe, and none but camel drivers appear ever to expose themselves voluntarily to it.

By and by, in some inexplicable manner, we got off the street, and found ourselves in a maze of small gardens. Gourds were lying about on

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the ground, melons peeped here and there from under broad leaves, and we saw that we were off the track. I did not like this at all, and explained with much vigour, in my broken Arabic, to the servants that we must get out of it as quickly as possible.

Visions of Arabic wrath, descending summarily upon us for trespassing, rose unpleasantly before me, and did not tend to make matters seem more agreeable. We extricated ourselves without loss of time, and got into the street again—evidently a bye-road, deep in sand, rough, rugged, irregular, full of rubbish, a sort of long narrow lane, with but few tracks of any kind upon it. Still, there was nothing to do but go on, and hope for something better to turn up, or *into*, soon.

Neither of the servants, as I think I have said, had ever been to Kassala before; it was all as new to them as it was to me; so, as to direction, I could get no assistance from them. After a time we did turn into another street; and at last we reached the very first bit of shade we had come across—not a tree, by no means —only a very narrow projecting roof.

I was by this time so tired, and the poor dogs looked so nearly dead, that I determined

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to halt for a bit and try to get some water for them and the donkeys; and to send off one of the servants to find the diwan, and inquire if a new Khawajah, who had never appeared in Kassala before, had been seen there that morning.

There was a nice little house not far away, but it had its back towards us; so I sent Ahmed round to the front to state our case and make inquiries. He had scarcely gone when he immediately returned with a very tall man and a very pretty little woman; the former bringing an angréb, and the latter water for me to drink in a beautiful gourd. They gave me a most kindly greeting, which, after our long, uncertain wandering, was very welcome, and wanted me to go into the house. I had always an insuperable, though perhaps foolish, objection to accepting any invitations of this kind when alone; so, thanking them, replied that I was anxious to go on.

They begged me at any rate to rest until Ahmed, who was just starting on his tour of discovery, returned, and they brought water in plentiful supplies for the dogs and donkeys, and a lovely mat of exquisite colours, made of the finest grass, to throw over the angréb.

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Ahmed then started, and I remained with Hussein and the animals under our narrow shelter, chatting with, I trust, an unconcerned air in my best Arabic to the pretty lady.

Ahmed was so very long away that at last I became uneasy about him; I began to think that not knowing Kassala he had lost his way, and that even if he had found Charlie he could not find us again; so, after waiting for nearly an hour, I determined to go on and pursue the now doubled search myself. I requested the Arab who had brought the angréb to give me a guide to the rest-house, and after some difficulty procured a small boy, who bestrode the black donkey, sitting on it in the most ludicrous manner at the very extremity of the animal, behind the saddle! He looked such a funny little imp perched upon the very tail of the donkey, that I could scarcely forbear laughing.

Then we started afresh; I on "Prince," Hussein leading the two poor fainting dogs, who even after their rest could scarcely keep up, and our swarthy little guide showing us the way. On and on and on we went, farther and farther into the heart of Kassala, and I could not imagine when we should come to a halt. At last we reached a rather imposing-looking

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building made of sunburnt bricks (all the houses in Kassala are of this description), the big gate of which was surrounded by soldiers and officers.

I inquired as well as I could for the Khawajah, and they appeared to reply that he had been there but had left again; they also seemed to express a wish to take me to the house of another European, but at the same time they seemed to say that Charlie was expected again to return to the place I had now arrived at! Altogether I became entirely perplexed, could not understand what they really meant, and felt somewhat at a loss.

They then informed me that he had chosen and hired a house, and suddenly appeared to *insist* on my going there, as they probably wished to get rid of me. Thinking I might possibly find him if I did, I turned "Prince" round and set off again. Hussein and the dogs came too, and we were this time taken in tow by a one-eyed leary-looking big fellow—the ugliest man I think I ever beheld in my life—in uniform of a most seedy appearance.

He led us a considerable distance to an empty house, which he seemed to imply was the one that had been hired, and wanted me

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to go in and wait there. This, however, I as usual refused to do, and he then took us off again through winding paths and circuitous routes to another house, without this time vouchsafing any explanation of where we were going to. We stopped before a large wooden gateway, or rather a huge massive double door which was closed, only a small door, cut in one side, about a foot from the ground, being open. Through this door I looked across a wide courtyard, in which I beheld to my surprise all manner of strange animals and birds walking about. It seemed that I had suddenly come upon a menagerie, and so in truth I had; but I will tell you of that later.

I waited at the gateway while my guide went inside, and in a minute out flew a most excited and animated young woman dressed in Arab costume, but chattering volubly in Italian. Having, I grieve to say, completely forgotten every word that I had once acquired of that language, I again struggled forth the little Arabic I knew, to which my friend immediately replied in a fluent stream of that language, which struck me as more bewildering than any I had ever heard from any native! At last she came to a stop, and seeing my total want

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of comprehension of all that she had said, shook her head in a melancholy manner, and mournfully observed to the surrounding little crowd, "Inglése, Inglése" (English, English). It then by a fortunate inspiration occurred to me that although I could not speak Italian and she did not know English, we might arrive at a mutual understanding in French, and I accordingly made the suggestion. To my relief she readily ejaculated, "Oh! oui, sans doute," and we were at home in an instant. I then told her that I was looking for my husband, "Madame, je cherche mon mari"! and explained the circumstances.

When I began to speak about it, it really seemed quite ludicrous to talk of searching for a man six feet six high, as though he were a small object that was in the habit of becoming mislaid; and the fact was it was rather *I* that was lost than *he*, for I had felt very lost indeed several times that morning! The Italian lady immediately assured me that scouts should be dispatched in every direction, that they would be sure to bring news of him ere long, and she begged me to come in until he was discovered. I thanked her, but having been told that the place I had first gone to was the Pasha's

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residence, which also, as well as the rest-house, is often called the Diwan, and thinking that as Charlie had already been to it, he was likely to return there, I said I would prefer going back.

So once again I turned "Prince's" head and plodded away through the scorching streets thick with burning, glaring sand and dust; but when I got to the Diwan, still no Charlie! This time, however, being pretty well exhausted, and feeling too that all further search was futile, I accepted the invitation which was again repeated, dismounted and went inside. I was conducted through a long narrow courtyard lined with soldiers, to a charming garden beyond, in which to my surprise, by means of abundant irrigation, two large shady trees and a fresh green lawn were flourishing.

The contrast to the parched ground outside was delightfully refreshing; I seemed indeed to have lighted at last on smooth pastures. The Pasha himself, with several Egyptian officers, all in uniform, were sitting under the trees, sipping coffee out of the minute cups I have before described, and they all looked so perfectly at their ease and so absolutely indifferent to any mental disquietude I could entertain or

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to any discomfort I had gone through, that I could positively have *slain* them all then and there! They rose, I am bound to say, as I entered, and gave me a formal greeting, but their manner altogether savoured somewhat, or so I fancied, of my being an intruder. A seat was brought for me,—for these officers actually had chairs,—and coffee was handed. I determined to seem as cool as they were, and received the passing assurance that "the Khawajah would shortly appear," which the Pasha offered in an offhand way, as a matter of course. What Charlie had done with himself meanwhile, or what they had done with him, either no one knew or no one deigned to explain. There was nothing for it but to bury my already much accumulated impatience, and unearth such Arabic as I had at command; I fear that I made but poor work, however, of both efforts, and after about a quarter of an hour of more or less dumb show, as I had to resort considerably to signs to convey my meaning, to my very inexpressible relief Charlie walked in.

He said that it had taken him much longer than he had imagined it would to obtain a house, but that as soon as he had surmounted

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the difficulties, he had set off again to the road to meet me. Meanwhile, as you will readily understand, I had entered Kassala by a different street, and we had missed each other.

He had gone on and on, thinking I had not yet come up, until he had met some of the servants, who had got ahead of the camels, and who had told him I was already in front, when he had at once turned back, and since then he had been looking for me in the same hopeless manner in which I had been searching for him!

He had seen on nearing the town that the statement of Hussein Kabiri as to the trees under which I was to rest was incorrect, and on tackling him regarding this fib, the man of course alleged that in times gone by they had been there. We subsequently ascertained that he had never yet visited Kassala himself! There was but little doubt that he had invented this pleasing fiction to expedite his own arrival at the city, as by this means he induced his master to start earlier than he would have otherwise done.

In a few moments we took our leave of the Pasha and officers, and were making our way to our own quarters, when, just outside the palace gate, a servant met us with a message

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from the Italian lady—for Italian she was—begging us to go to her house for breakfast. We gladly accepted, as we were very hungry, and there was no prospect (as this kind person had foreseen) of our getting anything prepared for ourselves for hours yet to come. The camels even were not up, so no cooking apparatus in the house which had been hired, was forthcoming—nothing but the shelter of the mere bare walls (as at Suakin) being afforded by our new dwelling.

We soon turned into the large courtyard that I had before looked into containing the curious animals and birds, but of them and of our host and hostess I will tell you in my next.

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LETTER XV.

Our host and hostess—A bountiful breakfast—Half-tamed young lions—All kinds of animals—Our hired house—Deep in dust—Cracks in the door—Inspected unawares—My new dog — The former threat — Camel drivers punished — Arabian costumes—We explore Kassala—A "careless ordered" garden—The pauper burying-ground.

KASSALA, 11*th March* 1878.

MY last left off just as we were going to breakfast at the house of our Italian friend; so I must tell you about her, her husband, her little girl, and all the strange animals they had. Madame is the wife of a German merchant, who is employed by an Austrian firm to purchase animals from the Arabs, and send or take them to Germany for menageries.

He is not going to Europe, however, this year, having taken home an immense number of creatures last season, and wishing to wait until he has as many another time. The court-yard in front of their house is fully an acre in extent, and round two sides of it are houses for the animals. In the daytime such as are tame

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enough and harmless are let out and allowed to walk about in this enclosure. It was so funny, and at first a little perplexing, to have to make one's way through a collection of big ostriches, black as well as white, antelopes, giraffes, kudus, pretty gazelles, with their large dark eyes staring timidly at one, and all sorts of other creatures, to the verandah where breakfast was prepared on the opposite side, facing the gateway. We got to it, however, in time, and *safely!* and I was much relieved to find that it was raised some two feet from the ground, so that these *pet* creatures would not be easily able to stray into it.

A most bountiful breakfast, or lunch, was provided for us, to which we were ready to do full justice. Everything was more in French or Italian than Arabic style,—the only dishes, indeed, which savoured at all of the country being a variety of sweetmeats in saucers, which were brought up with both meat and curry, and which rather reminded me, though they were sweet and not sour, of the condiments called "Sambals," which are a peculiarity of the Malay peninsula.

The meal consisted of excellent soup, roast fowls, roast mutton, curry, and a variety of

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puddings (besides the Arab sweetmeats),—claret and Bass's beer. Coffee followed, and also a delicious drink called "honey-water." When breakfast was over our host took his pipe, Charlie lighted his cigarette, and Madame led us off to show us her special pets.

In a barn, or rather a walled-in space, of about twelve feet square, were five young lions! —not very young either, for they were about half-grown—and up to these ferocious animals their mistress coolly walked, calling them each by name, and petting and caressing them as she would have caressed pet kittens. They were all chained, though allowed a good length of tether. Their excitement on seeing Madame was boundless; but whether, in spite of her assurances, this was all prompted by affection, I myself felt rather inclined to doubt, as she owned to be in the habit of bringing them their food. They sprang simultaneously to the extent of their chains, pulled at them till I trembled for the strength of the links, stood up on their hind-legs, and fought the air with their fore-paws, uttering all the while terrific howlings, and screeching in half-cracked voices—their full roar not being yet completely formed.

When more noise was made than even their

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mistress approved of, she silenced them by an uplifted hand, and a sharp decided exclamation; but the success of these gestures was for the most part but temporary, each one appearing to be particularly angry when she left it to caress another, and as often as this happened a fresh outburst of jealous rage broke forth.

I ventured no farther than the doorway, though she was very anxious that I should go up and pat them! but I said "I would defer that pleasure to another day," and kept discreetly near the entrance. We were then introduced to young ostriches, fluffy gray things about the size of guinea fowls, that had only just come out of their shells; and then we went to look at various species of odd deer and gazelle, and last of all to a big hippopotamus that was swimming about in an enormous bath—a great pit that had been dug in the ground for him, and which was daily filled with water; the water was as muddy as it could be, but master hippo seemed none the less pleased with it for that! He swam round and round, keeping his nose just above the surface, and occasionally diving and coming up again in another place unexpectedly. Sometimes he would raise his snout well above the water and give a great blow;

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and when at last he paddled out, up the sloping side of the bath, trampling the ground heavily with his big broad feet, with the water streaming from his huge sides, he looked as ugly a monster as one could well imagine.

Then we went home. I was dead tired; and in spite of the utter confusion of everything in our room—boxes and baggage having all been lumped down anywhere, as the camels had only just arrived—I could do nothing then towards righting them, but had my mattress laid down on top of a couple of trunks, and for the next two hours went fast to sleep.

On awaking and exploring I found that our "house" consisted in the room we were then in, which, to do it justice, is a good-sized one, between 30 and 40 feet long by 20 wide, a broad passage outside, and two small—very small—rooms farther on. A huge unoccupied space under the house is devoted to the servants and the cooking; while, as is often the way in Arab houses, the courtyard outside is surrounded by little sheds, which are appropriated respectively to our animals (the dogs, donkeys, and dromedaries).

One of the small upper rooms we have given to Sher Ullah, as I wish to have him near at all

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times, and within easy call. And now I must tell you what our room is like. *How* shall I describe it? If that which we occupied at Suakin was rough, it was a perfect palace to this one.

The floor has been made simply of beaten earth, or it may have been thin sunburnt bricks laid over the heavy rafters and rough beams that form the roof of the underneath part; and this floor is now so completely broken up that it is one mass of deep dust. To brush this all away would be impossible; the more it was brushed the more of this superstructure would be raised; and had we attempted it we should have run the risk of being positively smothered. Yet to move about on this floor as it was, and live on it for even ten days, was impossible; so we got matting, rough stuff; the same kind as that of which the natives make their huts, and laid it down in strips. The walls have not even plaster on them, but are merely the bare, sunburnt bricks, or mud, that all the houses are made of. The door and windows add the final stroke of *beauty* and *convenience!* To shut them at all was a work of skill and patience, until Charlie, by dint of filing and hammering, took the warp out of them sufficiently to over-

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come that difficulty in some slight measure. The door is a double one, across which a crazy bar has always to be adjusted if we require to close it. It is absolutely innocent of anything in the shape of bolts or handles; and I marvel that it possesses hinges. The windows are the crankiest venetians you can imagine, which bang mercilessly in their very frames with the slightest breath of air; and we have had to cut wooden pegs to poke in all round whenever there is any wind.

I was aware from the first that there were cracks in the door, but these gave me no great concern, and it certainly never occurred to me that they might be used as a vantage ground for inspection, until I saw for myself that this unpleasant fact was actually the case. It was fortunately the second day only after our arrival, and I therefore hope that the circumstance had not occurred previously to the occasion on which I discovered it. I was sitting by myself, not far from the door, sewing, when I heard a slight sound of moving outside, and then a sort of pushing or rubbing against the door; forgetting that I should have to remove the bar before any one could enter, I called out "come in" (in Arabic), and also inquired who was

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there. I got no reply, so looked up, when, to my extreme dismay, I distinctly beheld, on the other side of one of the widest slits, a large dark orb, which there was no mistaking, rolling itself round and about, evidently taking a general survey of all that came within its range. The white of a very black eye was occasionally as prominent as the eye itself, and looked from my position ghastily startling! I *almost* shrieked, but gathering my nerves together (a process I have been a good deal exercised in of late) I rose without a word, and going to the door removed the bar. There stood, just outside, a fine handsome young fellow as cool as a cucumber, with apparently no idea whatever that he had done aught to which exception could be taken. He looked so utterly innocent and unconscious that it would have been useless for me, with my scant supply of Arabic, to have endeavoured to enlighten him as to his conduct, and I was therefore obliged to allow the matter to pass. That evening, however, we pasted up strips of thick "drill" over the whole door inside, after which I felt snug and safe for the future.

This fine young darkey had brought a lovely dog as a present to me from Madame, a basket

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of fresh eggs, and a large jar of fresh milk. The dog was very shy and rather wild, poor thing, so I had it tied up in the passage outside, and did my best to make friends with it and to allow it to become accustomed to us; and the man was then dismissed with many messages of thanks, and an invitation to Madame to come and see us "to-morrow morning."

I told you some time ago, while we were on the march, that Charlie on more than one occasion threatened the camel drivers that if they persisted in disobeying his orders and taking their own way so entirely as they sometimes did, he would, on our arrival at Kassala, take them before the Pasha, and have them punished by him, or at any rate represent the case to him.

I felt sure that they never believed him, though I knew that he was equally determined as to his threat. The very next morning to our arrival, while we were busy having our boxes arranged, and the room made as tidy and respectable as the limited possibilities would admit of, our guilty men, with Hussein Kabiri at their head,—he who had crowned all his previous errors with the audacious invention as to trees near Kassala,—presented themselves at the door for the arrears of pay owing to them,

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—an advance having been made on our leaving Suakin. They were at once informed that the threat which they had so often disregarded was to be carried into effect; but they appeared absolutely thunderstricken at even the possibility of such an idea being repeated! They soon discovered to their cost that what had been said was meant. Charlie was deaf to all remonstrances. Uplifted hands and plaintive voices were for a long time to no effect, but I am not quite sure whether, after all, they might not have won the day, had not insolent words and bravado expressions suddenly cropped up. *That* settled the matter, and unlucky it was for those drivers that they did not keep their tempers; administering a sharp reproof, and seizing his hat, the Khawajah made off to the Pasha, calling to the erring flock to follow. It appeared to me rather like "Dilly, dilly duck, come and be killed!" but I believe that Hussein Kabiri was taken in tow by two of the servants and obliged to go too. Some of the men bolted; but all were found again in the town, and the case was laid before the "Vakil," the judge of Kassala, and the result was that instead of receiving any additional wages they were fined five dollars among them.

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The Pasha expressed his sincere approbation of this step that had been taken, and thanked Charlie cordially for representing the grievance. He said that if travellers in general would adopt this course the many complaints of the bad conduct of camel drivers, which so often indirectly reached him, would cease; for, if it was known and understood by them that Europeans would not stand it, and would seek official redress, they would not persist in thus offending. He trusted the circumstance would have a good effect, as the knowledge of it would swiftly spread among the natives.

On Thursday morning we had a long visit from Madame, who brought her little girl with her. She is a pretty child of six years old, fair, and with blue eyes like her father; and has altogether quite a Saxon type of face.

"Fanny" chatters nothing but Arabic, for both her parents speak it almost entirely. Her mother has been in Egypt and the Soudan together, nearly thirteen years, and it is the language of the servants and every one else surrounding the child. She is to go to Germany in a year or two to be educated, and will then learn the tongue of her fatherland—or perhaps

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I ought to say, more correctly, of her father's land—for the first time.

I consider myself most fortunate in having lighted upon this good-natured and sociably disposed European woman here in the very heart of the Soudan, for through her I shall now be able to see Arab women at home, and, in fact, have "harem life" unlocked to me, which otherwise would have been impossible. She kindly offers to take me everywhere, to show and tell me everything, and I am looking eagerly forward to the prospect. Having been so long in the country she not only speaks the language but is thoroughly up to all the ways and customs of the people, has the entrée to all the houses, even to the Pasha's, as well as to those of the wives of the Egyptian and Arab officers, and is conversant with everything and everybody. She brought me some lovely Arabian costumes this morning, as a gift, and showed me how to put them on; she always wears them herself, but it would take a great deal of practice and long habit to be able to manage them with either grace or comfort. Some day, however, I shall perhaps astonish you all by appearing suddenly as an Arab lady! in a flowing, soft white cotton robe, with a

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lovely crimson border, and a brocaded silk skirt of marvellous cut. The white robe (it is not a robe, but we have no word to express the garment; it is a very long and wide soft sort of sheet or wrapper) goes over the head, and yet down almost to the foot of the skirt, and is worn very cleverly, being thrown suddenly, if need be, by a most adroit turn of the wrist, across the face, so as to hide the features in an instant; or, if this is not desired, it is allowed to fall loosely, showing the face, yet it never appears to be in the way or to be inappropriate for any occasion.

The second morning after our arrival we got up soon after five, and went out, before it became hot, to look at the town. It seemed to me, on the morning of my memorable entrance, that I must have explored it *all*, as I had wandered through so many streets, but I now found that I had not half seen it. A great wall surrounds Kassala, and a wide trench or moat runs outside this, almost entirely round it. The houses are exceedingly irregular, and of all shapes and sizes.

It is on the river Gâsh; just now, as the hot season is so near, the water is very low and muddy, and there are great mud banks, left

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bare, which are, I should think, very unhealthy. By the river-side are large gardens; they vex my priggish mind exceedingly, but I can imagine that they might charm the heart of a poet or artist with their "careless ordered" style; yet I think that even Mr. Tennyson himself would wish them to be a little better kept.

In some places one can hardly get along the paths for the wealth of uncut gourds of all kinds that straggle over the place, and the borders, which might be trimmed, are quite small hedges of rank unkempt grass. Huge wheels turned by oxen, bringing up water from the wells, are going in every direction, and the streams run along through little furrows made everywhere about the ground, so that the whole place is thoroughly irrigated.

There are perfect groves of palm trees, large and small, in all directions; and on the whole these gardens are very pretty, although I am bound to confess that they sound much better on paper than they look in reality; and, as I said before, I cannot but think that they would be vastly improved by a little extra care; but then I own they would lose their chief Eastern characteristic, and might perhaps seem out of place.

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The tall, handsome, dark-skinned natives, dotted about among the rich foliage, looking now and then like model bronzes, with bits of bright colouring in their somewhat scanty vestures, add immensely to the picturesqueness of the general effect. We left the gardens, after a pleasant hour in them, and got into the outskirts of the town, and came immediately upon as desolate and terrible a bit of land as the other had been sweet and refreshing.

No water came into this place, for none was needed; the bare, dry, scorching sand answered every purpose; and what do you think this land was? The common or pauper burying-ground; and shall I tell you what we saw in it? We saw several graves or rather shallow holes, only about a couple of feet deep, into which bodies had the previous night been flung, without coffin or covering of any kind, but in which no bodies then were to be found!

Hyenas and jackals had dragged forth the human remains, devoured them, strewn the bones over the sands, and left the hair, which, in several instances, I saw with my own shuddering eyes lying there, tangled, knotted, and inextricably matted with sand and dust,—the most woeful and heart-breaking relic that could

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possibly exist of anything that had once had life!

This is a mournful subject to close with, but doubtless I shall have a more cheerful one another day.

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LETTER XVI.

Arrival of home letters—Fête at commandant's house—Gorgeousness and barbarism—The lady of the house—Four hundred people feasted—Vaulting on to the dais—Dinner announced—Dipping into the tureen—Fingers before forks—We wash our hands—Oppressive hospitality—Finjáns and zerfs—Arab coffee—Mode of grinding—Copper saucepans—Characteristic fraud.

KASSALA, 13*th March.*

SUCH a delicious packet of home letters has arrived this morning that I have been in the seventh heaven for the last two hours. They are the first I have had since I left Suez; and how intensely I have been longing for them none but myself can know. They came in most opportunely, for I was very tired and rather feverish, and they helped me to rest, and made me all right again with their dear welcome bits of news, and sweet familiar home-chat.

I have been getting rather over-fatigued of late with Kassala dissipations and much writing! for I have not only sent budgets home, but also back to my friends in Penang, and scribes' work

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in this terrible heat is no trifle. But I must tell you of my "outings" here. One morning Madame came in and asked me if I would go with her in the evening to a great fête at the house of one of the "commandants" of the forces here. Charlie was invited to the gentlemen's quarters, and I to that of the ladies.

Gladly we accepted, and at seven o'clock we set off. I was quite glad that I had brought a silk dress from Suez, and a few ornaments with me, though it seemed to me, at the time I packed them, that such an emergency as they might possibly be needed for was very unlikely to occur; and as we travelled farther and farther on our route through the dusty desert, I sometimes remembered them with quite an amused feeling as to their utter inappropriateness in such a land. Yet here they were coming delightfully to the front, and quite suitable.

I would have tried to wear my Arabic dress, but I felt that I should probably cut such an awkward figure in it that the ladies of the land would take my doing so as a very doubtful compliment indeed, and that I should do more justice to my own country in a costume which, if not nearly so artistic or graceful, I was at least at home in. Madame appeared in a very swell

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suit, indeed, of the native dress; an exquisite muslin skirt of the finest texture, immensely full, and falling in lovely folds. Her snow-white muslin "chuddah" (as they call it in India)—the large soft sheet-like garment going over the head, which I before described—was edged with a deep rich border, worked into it, of crimson silk and gold thread, and her shoes were crimson morocco, with satin bows to match. When we reached the house of the commandant we entered a courtyard, which had two doors in it, one on each side; and immediately Madame intimated to us that the one on the left was that which led to the part of the establishment in which the gentlemen were to feast, while that on the right would take her and myself to the ladies' side of the house. Several soldier servants were standing about, and one of them instantly vanished; whereupon the master of the house immediately appeared, and received us cordially and with elaborate politeness. Our party then divided, and I followed Madame into another courtyard. The scene that presented itself was novel, curious, and in every way a perfect study. The mixture of gorgeousness and barbarism was very striking.

About a hundred women, and innumerable

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children were in the courtyard, most of them were in costumes very similar to that which my Italian conductress was wearing; some of the dresses were made of splendid brocaded silks, of hues so intense in brilliancy that none but an Eastern could have worn them; others were simply white, with no colouring at all about them, and there was every variety of texture in the materials used. The colours were principally crimson, orange, and bright green; but over all invariably fell the soft white "chuddah."

In the midst of all this magnificent show was the very acme of incongruity in the way of *appointments*. In the open courtyard a few rude wooden benches, rough hewn and without backs to them, were placed here and there; but for the most part, on the bare earth, pieces of matting were thrown down, and on this matting, in distressingly close proximity to dust, mud, and occasional pools of water, these elegantly dressed women were squatting, apparently totally regardless of soil or stain. Nor was the courtyard reserved for human visitors, animals of every kind were running hither and thither at their own sweet will; yet there was no collection for a menagerie here—they were merely the domesticated creatures of the house.

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Goats in especial were there, from ancient fathers down to bleating little kids, which emitted unceasingly their distracting and annoying little cries; cocks and hens in abundance, a calf or two, an occasional pet lamb, a couple of donkeys, and a riding camel. Cooking was going forward in several adjoining sheds, and volumes of wood smoke were continually wafted out through these doorless huts on to the indifferent company. The lady of the house, who looked oppressed with care and heat, was, in spite of having numerous servants at her command, doing the principal part of the cooking herself, or at any rate superintending it all—it being considered the right mode of welcoming her guests, and of indicating how unboundedly glad she was to see them, for her to undertake this labour. She was not only constantly walking to and fro between the sheds—each one of which was appropriated to a different preparation—to see how all were progressing, but I often saw her standing over a seething pot stirring the contents herself. In spite of her labours she was dressed in white muslin, beautifully embroidered, with a long flowing veil of blue gauze, falling from the back of her head to below her waist. She carried a wailing, miser-

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able-looking baby on one arm the whole time, which clung to her with tyrannical pertinacity, and would not allow her to give it to any one else, or to put it down for an instant; and altogether she looked as though she would welcome the departure of her friends more than she could possibly have done their arrival, and I felt heartily sorry for her. The whole of the cooking for the Commandant's guests was also being carried on in this place, and under his wife's supervision; and I was told that entertainments had not only been going on the whole of that day but also the day before, and that more than four hundred people would have been feasted, from first to last, and that already fifteen sheep, fifty fowls, several kids, and two calves had been killed and cooked.

The occasion of this entertainment, which was an unusually large and important one, was the celebration of the rite of circumcision, which was to take place next morning, of the three boys of the family. The eldest was ten years old, the next six, and the third was the infant of about eight months, whom the mother was carrying in her arms.

After I had sat in the courtyard for ten minutes, and all the principal ladies had been

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presented to me, I was asked to go inside. At the farther end of a big square room, looking on to the courtyard, was a dais, so inconveniently high that I marvelled how it could possibly be mounted, as there were no steps whatever leading to it, or any sort of assistance by which one could climb up. The top of this dais was nearly as high as my waist, and though the Arab ladies are, as a rule, by no means short, they are not specially tall, yet on it were already snugly ensconced, seated crosslegged as before, five or six of the elderly and especially stout ones of the party, radiant in robes more resplendent even than those of their neighbours.

I looked round in perplexity for some means of joining the party as I was invited to do, and expressed my difficulty in French to Madame. To my amazement she responded by showing me immediately that long practice had made it as easy to her as to the Arab ladies. Placing one hand on the dais, and giving the other to a bystander, she vaulted herself on to the top with an agility which, under the circumstances, I envied; yet she was a rather stout woman, and a great deal shorter than myself. With the same ease she swung herself down again, and

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then held out her hand to me that I might do likewise.

I now felt that a most undignified moment had arrived! yet how to refuse I knew not, for those already on high were expecting me, and would probably take it as an insult if I did not join them. There was nothing for it but to make the effort; so with a desperate effort, and much more ado about it than was agreeable to myself, I achieved the spring—and only wished some one had been there to mount me—as though I were to be mounted on horseback, in which case there would have been no difficulty.

Vague notions rose before me of then and there teaching the Arab women how to ascend such elevations, by placing their feet in the palms of each other's hands and vaulting as if into a saddle; but I banished these ideas at once, feeling sure the experiment would be a dead failure, and reflecting, moreover, that I, as instructress, would have to commence the lesson, and to find a swarthy naked foot in my own palm as the first step!

Once up I sat myself down on the floor, not crosslegged but in my own fashion, and made myself as sociable as might be, and I was rewarded with some delicious coffee,

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the best I had yet tasted. After nearly half an hour of this position, when, in spite of being much interested in all that I saw and heard, I was beginning to get rather cramped, and to meditate what excuse I could frame for a descent, suddenly one of the many savoury odours, that had been occasionally wafted in our direction from the cooking-houses, came distinctly nearer, and in another moment several servants appeared bearing dishes and plates, and we were all invited to come to dinner. I was the first to exit from the exalted seat, and then I watched the others. It was marvellous how they shuffled and scrambled down! No one managed it so well as the Italian lady had done, but the fat "squaws," whom I thought would have been utterly "stumped," rolled themselves off it by each other's aid in an inexplicable fashion, and all landed safely on the ground, none the worse, and in high spirits in anticipation of the feast.

In default of chairs the benches from the courtyard were moved in, and there actually was a table to sit down to, but as this was diminutive, and untold numbers wished to press near it, we huddled closely together to make the most of the small space! The first thing

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that was placed on the table was a tureen full of excellent soup, and into this—true Eastern fashion, from long ages back—every one dipped their spoon to help themselves! You must not imagine that a portion was ladled out into everybody's plate, and that one dive all round was the allowance; by no means; we had no individual plates whatever; the tureen was our one plate in common. Back went the spoons for every fresh mouthful that was desired, mine among the number! and those that dipped fastest got most. Yes, dearest mother, be not shocked or marvel that I survived it, such was the fact; in Rome we must do as Rome does, and I would not have hurt these good and (in their own way, though it sounds difficult to believe it) *refined* people for the world. So, at the outset of affairs, I pocketed every reluctance and followed the general lead.

The soup removed, entremets appeared; they were brought, as they had been at Madame's house, in little saucers, and retaining our soup-spoons, *unwashed*, we dipped in a similar manner into these; but this time I was able to escape a repetition of the process by saying that I wished to taste them all, and that there were far too many for me to take more than a very little of

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each. Many of these dishes were most exquisite; sweets and meats were combined with a delicacy of which any cook might have envied the art; no flavour was too strong, none were sickly, and I could not help thinking that many a lady at home would have been right glad to know the secret of those entremets, which would have added to the attraction of any dinner table.

Then came the *pièce de resistance*, and such a magnificent joint as it was; a splendid saddle of mutton, unusually large and beautifully roasted; I saw no difference at all in its appearance to any saddle cooked in European style, and the meat was first-rate. But with it arrived a difficulty which I found to be really insurmountable. Nobody had knives and forks, and I doubt if they even knew of their existence; or if they did, their motto was evidently the old proverb, "Fingers were made before forks." The bones had been jointed before the piece was roasted, and the ladies presiding (for at this juncture several together made a dash at the dish) seized the joint, and while some held one part and some another, others tore the meat asunder, and, regardless of dripping gravy, succulent morsels were distributed all round. This

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was a little too much! I could not manage *that;* so declined taking any.

Blank dismay fell on the kind faces, for this was evidently the important part of the whole; but I said the former good things had more than sufficed, and, with unmistakable consideration, they immediately refrained from pressing me, so I became a silent spectator of this course. Directly it was finished a most necessary performance took place, but it was managed in quite a novel manner. Two servants came in, one of them bringing a very deep brass wash-hand basin with no water in it, but instead a sort of sieve, also of brass, which was fitted into it about two inches from the top. The other servant brought a jug, and even soap, with a number of towels flung over her arm. The basin was handed first to me, and, though not so much in need of it as my neighbours, for politeness sake I washed my hands. This was done by holding them over the basin while water was poured on them from the jug; all the water thus used ran away through the sieve into the basin and was not even seen, and every one got a fresh supply.

This clever arrangement, and the liberal supply of towels, also, seemed to me another

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strange incongruity in the ways of my new acquaintances; an unexpected piece of cleanliness and good management which I should scarcely have looked for, and this ceremony was enacted between each course. The entertainment was, however, not yet completed; succeeding the mutton came fowls, both roast and boiled, which were separated in the same way, and eaten in the same manner. By the aid of my spoon, which I had still kept, I managed to partake of this course, as the meat was so tender and well cooked that it was easily divided.

After the fowls curry was brought in, not one kind, but several; meat, chicken, vegetable and egg curries, in several varieties of dressing, and with innumerable condiments in accompanying dishes. These, also, I could manage; the difficulty consisting not so much in the manner of eating them as in how to refuse the abundance pressed upon one. It was so earnestly desired that I should try every one that the hospitality became really oppressive, and I had, as in the case of the entremets, to take a mere taste all round. I must add that, although my pressing hostesses looked woefully disappointed whenever I left anything on my plate, they always ab-

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stained from urging me to take more, merely remarking, with sympathising countenances, that I "must be very ill," as I did not eat. Their own appetites and capacities were truly amazing, and I should think not only that that feast ought to have lasted them for the rest of the week, but that they must have undergone an almost equal period of starvation previously.

Sweets of many sorts came in their turn, and were all as good as the rest of the dishes had been; the Arab ladies have certainly this excuse for any propensity towards epicurism, that they know well what dainty dishes mean, and can prepare their delicacies in a most appetising manner. The dinner, as you will not be surprised to hear, lasted the best part of two hours, and of the amusements that succeeded it I must tell you another day. Coffee was then handed, and as this coffee forms so important an item in every Arab household, I must describe the process of making it, and also the little cups, called finjáns and zerfs, in which it is brought.

The whole apparatus is quite a curiosity. The cups are both used at the same time, and before one becomes accustomed to this arrange-

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ment it is somewhat difficult to drink out of. One of these tiny receptacles, without stem or handle, is placed within another of very much the same size, but of rather a different shape. The outer one, which has a stem though no handle, is pointed towards the bottom, and bears a close resemblance to an egg-cup, being indeed almost exactly like it. The inner one, which is not pointed but round, and is therefore not a "fit" for the other, contains the coffee, but in raising it to one's lips it is very apt to overbalance and empty its boiling contents on one's knee. It is too hot to touch, the coffee being often brought to one almost bubbling, and the china or metal (for they are often made of brass) being very thin, so that one has to learn to hold one cup, and drink out of the other within it, at any angle it happens to be at. As a rule the inner cup is by no means placed in a mathematically straight position within the outer, and the edge of it rises about half an inch above it, which increases the difficulty. The manner, too, in which the coffee is ground is totally unlike our English method.

The beans are put into a hollow brass cylinder into which a piston fits tightly, and this piston is worked backwards and forwards

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with great force until the beans are crushed. The Arabs are extremely particular that these shall be reduced to the finest powder possible, and "ground coffee" in the Soudan means coffee quite as fine as flour; there is never the faintest sign of a grit or anything harsh to be discovered in it. It is always overpoweringly strong; in fact, almost like brandy, and has at first a terribly trying effect on one's nerves; indeed, it is for this reason that even the people themselves take it in such very small quantities at a time.

A couple of table-spoonfuls of this flour-like powder is considered the due proportion for only two of the little cups I have described, so *that* will give you an idea of the usual strength of Arab coffee; and in order that it may lose none of its rich fresh flavour, the beans are never ground long before they are needed. A certain quantity is prepared every morning, and it is the special duty of one person to see that this is done. It is taken so frequently during the day that an immense deal is required, and whenever a visitor is received for even the shortest call, coffee is immediately brought. It would be looked upon as sadly wanting in hospitality, or even ordinary politeness, to omit

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this custom; and to avoid delay, water, which is very nearly boiling, is invariably kept in every Arab house. The coffee is always made in a copper saucepan without a lid, and the size of the saucepan is selected according to the number of people it is required for.

The Arabs would not on any account boil it in a covered vessel, as they say that to ensure no bitterness being perceptible, all deleterious qualities should be allowed to escape; and on this account, as well as from their natural liking for its being strong, large quantities are used at every brew.

The following is the final preparation. The saucepan is nearly filled with water which is allowed to come almost to a boil. Into this water the finely-ground coffee is thrown, and almost directly after this is done, it all bubbles and froths up, having boiled completely. Instantly this occurs the saucepan is removed from the fire till the bubbling subsides, and this process is repeated three times before the coffee is considered fit to drink.

The cups have meanwhile been arranged on a tray, which is carried by one servant, while the saucepan containing the coffee is brought

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by another. No transfer from one coffee-pot to another being allowed. The coffee is then in an adroit manner, which only long practice can accurately attain, dashed, or rather jerked, from the saucepan into the cups; this is done to allow the rich amber foam on the top to come out, otherwise the coffee would pour in underneath it, and this froth, almost the most delicious part of the whole, would be left behind. A good servant will do this so neatly that, minute as the cups are, and gingerly as they are balanced one within the other, no accident takes place, not a drop is spilt, and tray and cup come to one in as perfect a condition as though the coffee had been poured through a tiny spout, suitable to the size of the cup. It is needless for me, I am sure, to tell you that neither sugar nor milk are ever taken with it; the rich froth, indeed, supplies the place of cream, and seems very much like it. I fear I must own that on having discovered the exquisiteness of this addition, it possessed so great a fascination for me that, as a rule, I somehow generally found the particular cup, which contained most of it, in my hand, after the tray had left me; and if my Soudanese neighbours noticed my little selfishness, they

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must at any rate have discovered that I had learned to appreciate one of the best things of their country.[1]

[1] On our return from the Soudan in July 1878, we passed through Paris, where the grand International Exhibition was then being held, and we visited the Arab quarter with special interest. The Arabs there, to their shame be it spoken, were passing off on Europeans, as best Arab coffee, stuff which their slaves would not have condescended to drink! We told these swarthy impostors, to their dismay and surprise, in their own tongue, of their iniquity; and the inborn propensity of the race, which defeated even national pride, came clearly to the front, as they coolly replied with the utmost *sang froid*, "They know no better, and they can't make as good for themselves!"

END OF VOL. I.

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